School-Based Sexuality Education: Teachers' Perspectives and Experiences Teaching the Recently Mandated Sexuality Education Curriculum in Quebec Elementary Schools

Felicity Burns

Department of Integrated Studies in Education

McGill University, Montreal

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Abstract

In 2018 Quebec became the latest province to mandate school-based sexuality education. The Quebec curriculum proposes a comprehensive approach to teaching sexuality education from kindergarten to grade eleven. While there is extensive literature around school-based sexuality for adolescents, there have been fewer studies that focus on sexuality education in primary schools. This study aimed to fill that gap as it focused uniquely on the experiences of Quebec elementary school teachers, and thus provides timely insight into an often-overlooked category of educators being asked to deliver sexuality education. As such my research specifically asked: how are elementary school teachers using, understanding and experiencing the Quebec sexuality education curriculum? Consequently, this research study also serves to shed light on the factors that may facilitate or hinder curricular implementation.

This study was guided by a qualitative methodological framework, which consisted of a review of the relevant literature, as well as an exploratory online survey with a sample of eight elementary school teachers in Quebec. The theoretical frameworks that build the foundation for this research are curriculum theory, the theory of planned behaviour, and reflexive theory and practice. The main themes that emerged through the data analysis relate to (1) teachers' perspectives on the delivery of sexuality education; (2) the supports and strategies for implementation, such as teaching through literature and collaborative team cultures; and finally (3) the limitations and barriers to implementation, which includes the lack of resources and vague curricular documents; time constraints; inadequate education and training; and teachers' discomfort. The findings point to the complexity of implementing the Quebec sexuality curriculum. This study also asserts that successful implementation in schools is highly dependent on the teacher and their perception of the curriculum, their degree of preparation, and their

attitude towards teaching sexuality education. These findings can be used in consultation with various stakeholders including educators, curriculum designers and policy makers, Ministry of Education board members, administrators, and education faculty at post-secondary institutions, in order to formulate recommendations and interventions to best support meaningful and lasting implementation of the sexuality curriculum in Quebec.

Résumé

En 2018, Québec est devenu la prochaine province à rendre obligatoire l'éducation sexuelle en milieu scolaire. Le programme propose une approche compréhensive pour enseigner l'éducation à la sexualité de la maternelle jusqu'à la onzième année. Bien qu'il existe une abondante littérature sur la sexualité en milieu scolaire pour les adolescents, il y a moins d'études qui se concentrent sur l'éducation sexuelle dans les écoles primaires. Cette étude visait à combler cet écart car elle se concentrait uniquement sur les expériences des enseignants du primaire au Québec, et fournit ainsi un aperçu opportun de recueillir des informations auprès d'une catégorie d'éducateurs souvent négligée qui sont tenus de d'enseigner l'éducation sexuelle. Ma recherche demandait spécifiquement : comment les enseignants du primaire utilisent-ils, comprennent-ils et vivent-ils le programme Québécois d'éducation à la sexualité ? Par conséquent, cette étude de recherche met en lumière les facteurs qui peuvent faciliter ou entraver la mise en œuvre de ces programmes.

Cette étude a été guidée par une méthodologie qualitative, qui consistait d'une revue de la littérature et un sondage exploratoire en ligne avec huit enseignants du primaire au Québec. Les cadres théoriques qui constituent le fondement de cette recherche sont la théorie du curriculum, la théorie du comportement planifié, et la théorie et la pratique réflexives. Les thèmes principaux qui ont émergé concernent (1) les points de vue des enseignants sur la prestation de l'éducation sexuelle ; (2) les supports et stratégies de mise en œuvre, comme l'enseignement par la littérature et les cultures d'équipe collaboratives, et enfin (3) les limites et les obstacles à la mise en œuvre, qui comprennent le manque de ressources et des documents pédagogiques vagues ; les contraintes de temps ; la formation et éducation inadéquates ; et l'inconfort des enseignants. Les résultats soulignent la complexité de l'éducation à la sexualité au Québec. Cette étude affirme également que la réussite de la mise en œuvre dans les écoles

dépend fortement de l'enseignant et de sa perception du programme, de son degré de préparation et de son attitude envers l'enseignement de l'éducation sexuelle. Ces résultats peuvent être utilisés en consultation avec les éducateurs, les concepteurs de programmes d'études, les membres du conseil du Ministère de l'Éducation, les administrateurs, et les professeurs d'éducation dans des établissements postsecondaires, pour formuler des recommandations et des interventions pour soutenir la mise en œuvre significative et durable du programme d'études sur l'éducation à la sexualité dans Québec.

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Introduction

Context

In today's Western societies, children and adolescents are overwhelmed with messages about sexuality from a variety of sources, including their parents and other family members, their friends and peers, and all forms of media (Milton, 2003, p.241; Duquet, 2003, p.6). At best, these messages can increase self and sexual esteem; positive body image; access to information; and sexual fulfillment regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religious background, ability, or other such characteristics (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008, p.2; Action Canada, 2015, para.7). At worst, these messages may compromise lifelong healthy sexuality by promoting risky sexual behaviours, such as unprotected sex, multiple sexual partners, and intercourse before the age of 15 (Kumar, Lim, Langford & Seabrook, 2013, p.74).

According to the Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN), sexual health is multidimensional and involves the achievement or enhancement of positive sexual health outcomes (e.g., mutually rewarding interpersonal relationships) and the reduction or avoidance of negative outcomes (e.g., unwanted pregnancy, or sexually transmitted infections) (SIECCAN, 2010, p.2). Generally, the status of the sexual health of Canadian youth is assessed by "trends in teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, age of first intercourse, and condom use" (SIECCAN, 2010, p.2). Recent statistics clearly illustrate why the sexual health of today's young people should be a national concern. For instance, a substantial number of Canadian adolescents are sexually active at a relatively young age and the proportion of youth reporting having sex by the age of 15 has been rising since the beginning of the 1980s (Garriguet, 2005, p.9). Statistics show that 12% of Canadian youth lose their virginity before the

age of fifteen and most of them remain sexually active after their first experience (Brushett, 2007, p.1; Rotermann, 2005, p.39). In addition, about 4 in 10 sexually active 15-to-24-year-olds reported they did not use a condom the last time they had sex (Rotermann, 2005, p.40). Finally, 60,000 teenage females in Canada become pregnant each year (Brushett, 2007, p.1).

Moreover, sexual abuse and assault have an elevated presence among today's youth, especially for women, people of color, and queer and trans individuals (Brushett, 2007, p.5; Starker, 2017, p.84). Recently, campus sexual assault has garnered a lot of critical attention in the United States and Canada alike (Starker, 2017, p.1). However, individuals who experience sexual violence outside of the college or university setting receive less recognition. Notably, statistics show that individuals outside of the university system (i.e., they never attended a post-secondary institution or are not college-aged) actually experience sexual violence at higher rates (Starker, 2017, p.1). In Quebec, the Institut National de Santé Publique reported that approximately one male out of ten (9.6%) and one female out of four (22.1%) has been a victim of at least one sexual assault with physical contact before the age of 18 (Tourigny et al., 2008, p.333). A study of 220 male and female youth in Nova Scotia found that "18% had had sexual intercourse as a result of pressure and 43% had been victims of date abuse. 40% of the aforementioned youth did not seek help following their sexual assault, and only 25% were able to obtain helpful assistance subsequent to their forced sexual experience" (Brushett, 2007, p.5). Data collected from youth across British Columbia show "that experiencing sexual abuse is a precursor for other threats to sexual health such as very early sexual intercourse (before the age of 14), experiencing or causing a pregnancy, and a lower likelihood of using condoms" (Maticka-Tyndale, 2008, p.87). It is for these reasons scholars like Starker (2017) argue that "sexual violence prevention efforts must start at a younger age, and must provide young people

with the tools to view the world critically and with an awareness of the power dynamics and institutions that allow sexual violence to continue occurring" (p.84).

Furthermore, the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among Canadian young people is remarkably high and disproportionately affects Indigenous people. In the early 2000s, the proportion of Indigenous youth in Canada reporting STIs was 2.5 times higher than the corresponding figure for non-Indigenous (Rotermann, 2005, p.41). Furthermore, "the rates for gonorrhoea and chlamydia infections in Nunavik are respectively 9 and 73 times higher than those reported for the province of Quebec; and these gaps have been observed for more than 20 years" (Morin, 2017, p.1).

In her dissertation exploring Inuit youth's voices on sexual health from communities in Nunavik—the northern part of Quebec, Morin (2017) notes that the sexual health of Indigenous communities is cause for concern to many and ultimately reflects "the magnitude of several other issues that native communities face nowadays, rooted in colonialism" (p.1). She extends on this, citing the "loss of of social ties and disruption of the transmission of knowledge, increased availability of sexual partners (through settlement in villages), replacement of marriage arrangement by courtship, and mandatory schooling have redefined sexual networks and youth's ability to make informed choices about sexuality" (Morin, 2017, p.1). Morin (2017) also puts forth how colonial policies have disturbed the matriarchal social organization of these communities and created a problematic imbalance among genders (p.1). She thoughtfully links this disempowerment to the rise of sexual violence and women's victimization, which, in turn, increases their vulnerability to STIs (Morin, 2017, p.1). She powerfully reiterates that these issues are "a direct consequence of colonialism" and are only "exacerbated by economic hardship and substance abuse" (Morin, 2017, p.1). To elaborate, the colonial values underlying

Canadian criminal laws, policies, and practices have "led to cultural alienation, territorial dispossession, intergenerational trauma, systemic discrimination, and socio-economic marginalization, which together continue to have profoundly negative impacts on the lives of many Indigenous people today" (Government of Canada-Department of Justice, 2019, para.4). For example, this has led to "high rates of serious physical health problems, issues with mental health and cognitive impairment, suicide, physical and sexual abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, interpersonal violence, family breakdown, and involvement both as victims/survivors and accused/convicted persons in the criminal justice system" (Government of Canada-Department of Justice, 2019, para.4). Morin's dissertation echoes discussions from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015 in which colonialism was identified as "leading to the disempowerment of Indigenous women by replacing existing forms of Indigenous government, in which women held significant influence and powerful roles in many First Nations" (Government of Canada-Department of Justice, 2019, para.4). Similar ideas were also expressed by The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Interim Report in 2017. They note that Indigenous women are often devalued in Canadian society, which, in turn, has led to "alarming rates of violence and increased interaction with the criminal justice system as both victims/survivors and accused/convicted persons" (Government of Canada-Department of Justice, 2019, para.4).

Morin (2017) also explains how individual or personal trauma, such as the abuse that took place in residential schools, have "impacted sexual health in many ways, from repeated sexual and physical abuse, to jeopardized parenting capabilities, often limiting the discourse around sexuality to the need to protect oneself from abuse, and not addressing the whole of sexual health within families" (p.1).

There is an apparent need for more intersectional and holistic approaches to sexual health and well-being. Simply put intersectionality theory addresses "the complex, cumulative ways that different identities and forms of discrimination combine, overlap, or intersect" (Morrison, 2017, para.1). Therefore, the sexual knowledge and well-being of an individual is a dynamic product of their age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religious background, ability, or other such characteristics and experiences. A holistic and intersectional sexuality curriculum would explore how these privileged and oppressed identities impact one's sexual health and decisions. As Russel et al. (2020) illustrate this means "two people from the same community or family may have distinct sexual knowledge, sexual experience, or sexual health based on subtle differences in their personal characteristics or beliefs, relationships, schooling, or other factors" (p.597). A curriculum that lacks an intersectional lens or framework may discuss, for example, the risks and dangers of STIs; however, it does not explain that Indigenous youth and youth of color are disproportionately impacted by sexual harassment, sexually transmitted infections, and unintended pregnancy. Consequently, comprehensive and intersectional sexuality education would be tailored to the diverse needs of students in order to inform, equip, and empower them to navigate their current and future sexual well-being (Russel et al., 2020, p.579). Intersectional sexuality education could bring "an awareness and understanding of how sexual health is tied to society at large" (Morrison, 2017, para.3). Therefore, it would undoubtedly benefit marginalized Canadian communities as well as the general public.

Overall, there are more than 7 million youth across Canada and approximately 3 million of these teenagers are infected with STIs annually (Brushett, 2007, p.1). In fact, Canadians 15 to 24 years of age have the country's highest incidence of chlamydia and gonorrhea infections

(Kumar et al., 2013, p.74). Chlamydia rates are particularly concerning because, if left untreated, they can have long-term consequences on the reproductive health of women (SIECCAN, 2010, p.3). A study by Boyce, Doherty-Poirier, MacKinnon, Fortin, Saab, King and Gallupe (2006) on the sexual behaviours and health of Canadian youth found that "the prevalence of STIs could be explained by the tendency of youth to use birth control pills exclusively as their contraceptive method of choice rather than condoms" (Garcia, 2013, p.11). It could be argued that Canadian young people continue to be most vulnerable to STIs because they lack important knowledge and skills related to sexual behaviors, STIs, contraception, and reproduction (Illes, 2012, p.614).

A study by Kumar and colleagues (2013) assessed the sexual knowledge of a sample of Ontarian adolescents who had completed high school sex education. They found that many respondents held misconceptions about reproductive physiology and contraception (Kumar et al., 2013, p.77). For example, there was a notable belief that the "morning-after" pill causes abortion, which the researchers conclude may lead to the underuse of emergency contraception (Kumar et al., 2013, p.77). These misconceptions are often mediated by geographical, social, and economic forces, which overwhelmingly affect youth's access to sexual health knowledge and resources (Garcia, 2013, p.13). To illustrate, Garcia (2013) notes that "health care resources are more limited in marginalized communities, which may include socio-economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, rural locations, and areas with a large population of Aboriginals" (p.13). Moreover, when sexuality resources are available, they may not be inclusive. For instance, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, or Questioning (LGBTQ+) youth are still overwhelmingly underrepresented in sex education programs (Garcia, 2013, p.12). Therefore, young adolescents are in urgent need of sexuality knowledge and skills that are inclusive, broad-based and relevant to realities of their lives.

Overall, these findings and statistics warrant attention and necessitate research and education. It raises concerns about whether young Canadians have sufficient knowledge to make responsible sexual decisions. For these reasons, I argue that sexuality education is paramount and could be best served through school-based sexuality education (SBSE) initiatives.

"Schools are the only formal educational institution to have meaningful (and mandatory) contact with nearly every young person" (SIECCAN, 2010, p.4). These institutions are charged with the responsibility of providing students with developmentally appropriate knowledge and skills. As a result, schools are in a unique position to provide integrated and inclusive sexuality education (McKay, Byers, Voyer, Humphreys, Markham, 2014, p.159). School-based sexuality education refers to the formalized approach to teaching about sexuality, which provides scientifically accurate, relevant, inclusive, timely or age-appropriate information, in a school setting (Jones, 2011, p.371; Goldman & Coleman, 2013, p.277). Sexuality is a complex concept that encompasses more than just sexual activity (Brushett, 2007, p.4). It covers an array of sexual emotions, activities, decisions, and desires (Brushett, 2007, p.5). Here sexuality includes anything related to "the constructions of sexed and gendered bodies, identities and behaviours; sexual feelings, desires, and acts; and sexual knowledge, skills, and information" (Jones, 2011, p.371). Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of "biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors" (Dowd, 2009, p.28). The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) highlights that sexuality education is a "lifelong process of acquiring information about sexual behaviour" (Schmidt, Wandersman & Hills, 2015, p.178). Therefore, as Jones (2011) articulates, sexuality education is as a hyponym, or umbrella term, in which puberty and sexual health education, relationship education, and other types intersect (p.371).

According to Shannon (2016), the broad aim of school-based sexuality education is to "equip students with information to aid them in maintaining their sexual and emotional health as they navigate adolescence" (p.573). Meaningful SBSE provides safe, structured and non-judgemental spaces for youth to explore their own sexual values, beliefs, and attitudes, as well as those that are normalized, reproduced and circulated by the dominant culture. It does so without prescribing or normalizing particular behaviours or practices over others. It also serves to create opportunities to build decision making and risk reduction skills in regard to sexuality and sexual health (Goldman & Coleman, 2013, p.277). SBSE can be used to create empowered sexual citizens.

There exists a wealth of literature exploring the efficacy of school-based sexuality education (Goldman & Coleman, 2013, p.277; SIECCAN, 2010, p.7). For instance, Berne and Huberman noted that countries such as the Netherlands, Sweden, France, and Germany have some of the lowest rates of reproductive health concerns among youth in the Western world (Milton, 2003, p.242). To illustrate, the Netherlands have a teenage pregnancy rate approximately 1/5th that of Canada (Langille, MacKinnon, Marshall & Graham, 2001, p.246). This difference is said to be linked to the approaches, discourses, and quality of sexuality education (Langille et al., 2001, p.246). These countries "espouse sexuality education on grounds of equality, social justice, and their legal duty of student safety and protection" (Goldman & Coleman, 2013, p.277). Research in North America also demonstrates the constructive benefits of comprehensive and interactive sexuality education in primary and secondary schools (Cohen, Byers & Sears, 2012). Evidence from studies measuring the behavioural impact of sexuality education interventions show "that the incidence of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections among youth is lower and the age of first sexual intercourse is later when

they received this type of broad-based sexual health education" (SIECCAN, 2010, p.7; Cohen et al., 2012, p.299; Dowd, 2009, p.16). However, despite the empirical evidence suggesting SBSE is a necessary tool to inform youth, the legitimacy and content of sexuality education programs in schools are still largely contested by conservative narratives in society, such as discourses of childhood innocence (Illes, 2012, p.613). As a result, the quality and quantity of sex education in Canada remains insufficient and inconsistent (Illes, 2012, p.614).

This lack of coordination is not inconsequential and is a particular concern for Quebec given that as of September 2018 they became the latest province to mandate that all primary and secondary schools include sexuality education in the curriculum. The timing of this decision coincides with other popular sexuality themed actions including the global #MeToo movement on social media. This decision comes primarily from growing concerns over the sexual health of Quebec adolescents. In 2011, McGill Health Promotion Coordinator Amanda Unruh argued that "youth are at the frontlines" in terms of facing sexual health problems in the province (Garcia, 2015, p.10). She also argued for sex education to occur in schools, through a regulated program, in order to fight the rising STI statistics (Garcia, 2015, p.10). This sentiment was shared by other health, sexuality, and women coalitions in Quebec, including the Quebec Women's Federation (QWF) and Quebec's Planned Pregnancy Federation (QPPF) (Garcia, 2015, p.10). These concerns and arguments eventually led the Quebec Ministry of Education to implement a mandatory sexuality curriculum in the Quebec Education Program (QEP). Education Minister Sébastien Proulx explained that with the new sexuality curriculum students would be taught lessons related to themes such as sexuality, sexual assault, stereotypes, and sexual health and behaviors, and that topics would be age appropriate (Alphonso, 2017, para.2). He told reporters in 2017, "I know it's not an easy subject, I know these questions are sensitive. But we have to

respond as a society to a societal issue" (Alphonso, 2017, para.3). Chris Markham, the executive director of Ophea, a not-for-profit organization that is committed to healthy schools, commended Quebec on introducing sexuality education (Alphonso, 2017, para.16). He added, "Part of school education is health education and the concepts of well-being and wellness. It's such an important conversation to be having in today's world" (Alphonso, 2017, para.16).

The province of Quebec is a unique and interesting context to study sexuality education as it differs, in some ways, socially and ideologically from the rest of Canada. Quebec is tied to its distinctive French culture, heritage and nationalism. Quebec is also influenced by the perceived binary between Catholicism and secularism, which creates a unique set of values. As a result, it warrants specific research attention. Quebec, once the most conservative part of Canada, has shifted and become more liberal on certain social issues (Brownridge, 2002, p.90). This is especially noted in Quebec's *laissez-faire* attitude and culture of sexuality.

Research on the sexual health and behaviors of Canadian young people show provincial variations exist and young adolescents in Quebec are more likely to report being sexually active than those in Ontario and western Canada (Chung, 2011, para.9; Garriguet, 2005, p.11). In fact, 18% of adolescents in Quebec and 15% in the Atlantic provinces reported having had sex at age 14 or 15 (Garriguet, 2005, p.11). Meanwhile, only 10% of adolescents in Ontario and the western provinces reported this (Garriguet, 2005, p.11). In addition, young people in Quebec also reported higher odds of having sex without a condom (Rotermann, 2005, p.40). Data from 2009/2010 shows the prevalence of condom use was above the national average in Ontario (73%), Alberta (73%), North West Territories (78%) and Nunavut (79%) and below average in Quebec (60%) (Rotermann, 2012, p.3). A study conducted at the request of Trojan, a brand of condoms and sexual lubricants, found that despite the exceptional increase of STIs in Quebec, 3

out of 5 young people in the province would be ready to abandon condoms at the first opportunity (Fortier, 2010, p.434).

These regional differences in sexual behavior may be related to or mediated by cultural factors specific to Quebec. For instance, Martin Blais, a professor in the department of sexology at the Université du Québec à Montréal, describes the culture of sexuality in Quebec as being "less framed by tradition like sex only in marriage, or by religious morals", (Chung, 2011, para.13). Blais adds that Quebec is also "less framed by the importance of love in sexuality" (Chung, 2011, para.13). This is likely a result of the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s and the secularization of Quebec society and social institutions, including the shift from religious to language-based schools. Researchers note that there is evidence of greater "permissiveness" among Quebecers in regard to sex, which may mean more sexual partners and more variation in the kinds of sex they have (Chung, 2011, para.14). We see this in Montreal, especially, which is known for its night life and events like Fetish Weekend—Canada's largest fetish social gathering. It is no surprise Quebec is known as the erogenous zone of Canada and many Quebecers are proud of this! Mondeose, owner of a Montreal club by the same name which organizes events to encourage people to challenge social norms and explore their sexuality, especially by having sex with others outside their relationship, says "What I want Montreal to be remembered for is a new-age thinking about sexuality" (Chung, 2011, para.2). While the club may be too radical for some, his message and philosophy are more widely supported. There is no denying that Quebec is exploring and changing its sexuality attitudes and behaviors!

Quebec's shift away from traditional and patriarchal ideologies is also apparent in its legal distinctions and anomalies. For example, "Quebec was the first, and for many years, the only province where abortions were available outside a hospital setting, in defiance of federal

law" (Maticka-Tyndale, et al., 2001, p.8). Moreover, in 1978 Quebec was the "first in North America to outlaw discrimination based on sexual orientation in its Charter of Rights and Freedoms, an act 'seen as very avant-garde at the time'" (Chung, 2011, para.24). In turn, the province of Quebec is recurrently constructed as a "safe haven" for LGBTQ+ people (Richard, 2015, p.114). However, it is important to note that the lived experiences of many members of the LGBTQ+ community is not always in accordance with these laws. Ongoing harassment, stigmatization, homophobia, and bullying (that is psychological or verbal, physical, or sexual) is still widespread among sexual minorities and many LGBTQ+ people continue to confront rejection from their peers, family, and religious communities. So, while these contemporary policy changes construct LGBTQ+ people as "rights-bearing citizens" (Smith, 2020, p.69), the "full recognition of the rights and freedoms of sexual and gender diverse people are still not achieved" (Montreal Prides Celebration, 2020, para. 1)

It is for these reasons that the sexuality landscape of Quebec is unique and of such great interest. It is also why mandated SBSE is increasingly timely, important, and necessary to help Quebec young people navigate the complexities of sexuality and their sexual behavior individually and collectively.

The Quebec curriculum proposes a broad, inclusive, comprehensive approach to teach sexual health from kindergarten to grade eleven. However, there are still many challenges and concerns regarding its implementation. For instance, there are concerns regarding time constraints, ministerial guidelines, and the lack of teacher training and willingness to teach sexual health education (Garcia, 2015). In effect, the implementation and effectiveness of broad, skill-based sexual health curricula are largely contingent on the teacher. As Levenson and Hamilton (1989) highlight "implementation of educational innovations is ultimately

accomplished by individuals, not institutions" (p.156). As such, the implementation of the Quebec SBSE curriculum and the effectiveness of this curriculum at influencing students' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour depends on how the teachers use, understand and experience the sexuality education curriculum.

Unfortunately, prior research shows many non-specialist teachers in Canada do not feel willing to provide broad-based sexuality education or they are only willing to cover some of the topics in the curriculum (Cohen et al., 2012). For example, many teachers do not cover more sensitive topics such as sexual orientation and sexual pleasure (Cohen et al., 2012). Teachers may be less likely to facilitate sexuality education, especially topics deemed controversial, when they lack knowledge and training; feel discomfort engaging with the topic; and fear generating controversy or disapproval from parents, community groups, or school administrators.

Cohen and colleagues (2012) conducted a research study to understand the factors associated with Canadian schoolteachers' willingness to teach sexual health education. They examined four skills related to teacher characteristics including, "perceived knowledge about sexual health topics, comfort teaching sexual health topics, training in sexual health, and experience teaching sexual health education (SHE)" (Cohen et al., 2012, p.300). The findings suggest that teachers who reported a greater willingness to teach SHE also reported less teaching experience, participation in training to teach SHE, experience teaching sexual health, feeling knowledgeable about sexual health topics, and perceived broad-based sexual health education as being important (Cohen et al., 2012). Interestingly, teachers' perceptions of their knowledge about sexual health topics was the most important contributor to their willingness to teach SHE (Cohen et al., 2012). Despite these findings, the problem remains that we simply do not know

how elementary school teachers in Quebec are understanding and experiencing the newly mandated sexuality curriculum.

Purpose of the Study

Although previous research provides a comprehensive overview of the problem, there is still a gap in the current research. Prior research has not explicitly considered sexuality education in the unique context of Quebec, especially in light of the newly mandated sexuality education curriculum. Additionally, while there are several studies exploring sexuality education from the perspective of stakeholders such as students, parents, religious groups, etc. there is a lack of research specifically focused on teachers' experiences implementing sexuality education. Therefore, the proposed research will be one of the first to explore teachers' perspectives and lived experiences regarding the new sexuality education curriculum in Quebec. Teachers are one of the forefront members of successful curriculum change and implementation. Therefore, I argue, it is important and valuable to give them a voice to share their thoughts and experiences. This study will provide teachers with an opportunity to critique the strengths and limitations of the newly mandated Quebec sexuality education program. As such any differences between what is envisioned through curricular objectives and what is actually enacted in classrooms can be identified and adapted to support meaningful teaching and learning for all.

Research Question

My research will explore the lived experiences of elementary school teachers following their first few years of teaching the newly mandated sexuality education curriculum as defined by the *Ministère de l'Éducation et Enseignement Supérieur* in Quebec. This study will focus

uniquely on the experiences of elementary school teachers because they are often an overlooked category of educators being asked to deliver sexuality education. In fact, the lack of prior research exploring these teachers' perspectives and experiences teaching sexuality education is quite alarming given that elementary educators are now tasked with the responsibility of creating students' foundational knowledge and understandings of sexuality. Furthermore, often when sexuality education is implemented in schools it is during the later elementary years or in high school (i.e., time periods associated with puberty). However, the new Quebec curriculum aims to teach age-appropriate sexuality education from kindergarten to grade eleven. As a result, elementary school teachers will be navigating many firsts; for many it will be the first time they teach sexuality education and/or the first time they teach sexuality education to such young students. In turn, these educators may be subjected to more criticism, controversy, or disapproval from parents, other staff, or community members. It is for these reasons I strongly believe elementary school teachers' voices deserve to be heard during this time. In my opinion, they are the most attuned to participate in this study and attest to the strengths and limitations of the newly mandated sexuality curriculum.

As such, my research will specifically ask: How are elementary school teachers using, understanding and experiencing the sexuality education curriculum in Quebec elementary schools? Sub-questions to further guide this inquiry are as follows:

- What are teachers' perspectives and willingness in teaching the content of the sexuality education curriculum? What factors may influence teachers' willingness to teach sexuality education?
- What are the best practices that teachers have learned or reportedly employed during their first few years of teaching the sexuality education curriculum?

- What supports are available to assist teachers in implementing the new sexuality education curriculum? What limitations or difficulties have teachers encountered while implementing the sexuality education curriculum?

Where Are We Headed? Chapter Summaries

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter One will consist of an in-depth literature review and examine topics such as school-based sexuality education, the sexual behaviour of children, and teachers' perspectives on teaching sexuality education. I will also consider the supports and limitations to implementing sexuality curricula in schools. In Chapter Two I will explore the theoretical frameworks which underly this research, namely curriculum theory, the theory of planned behaviour, and reflexive theory and practice. Chapter Three will focus on my research methodology. In Chapter Four I will summarize my research findings. The data will be organized by themes. Chapter Five will be the discussion and conclusion of this research. In this final chapter, I will discuss the results in relation to the relevant literature, provide recommendations based on the findings, explore the limitations of the study, and point to areas for future research.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review will examine the approaches and discourses pertaining to school-based sexuality education, as well as teachers' perceptions on teaching sexuality education. I start by reviewing the literature on the sexual behaviour of children. Following this, I explore sexuality education in the unique context of Quebec. Particular attention is given to the newly mandated sexuality education curriculum as defined by the *Ministère de l'Éducation et Enseignement Supérieur* through the Quebec Education Program (QEP). Finally, I consider the teachers' role in curricular change and fidelity. More specifically, I look at teachers' perspectives on teaching sexuality education and I consider the supports and limitations to implementing sexuality education in schools. By examining these themes and elements, the findings from this literature review will support the investigation of the subjective lived experiences of elementary school teachers following their first few years of teaching the Quebec sexuality education curriculum.

Sexuality Behaviors & Young Children

When considering school-based sexuality education there is often a lot of discussion and debate in regard to when (i.e., what grade) these curricular initiatives should be implemented. Should SBSE commence in elementary or high school? Adults are often cited claiming children are too young to learn about sexuality topics. This resistance has been shown, in some studies, to come from mainstream discourses which deny that children are sexual beings (Illes, 2012, p.618).

The discourses of childhood innocence construct a romanticized image of a sexually ignorant and vulnerable child, which as Fegan (2010) notes results in "sanitized and idealized images of innocence and safety in schools" (p.12). In these models, children are perceived as not developmentally capable of understanding sexuality (Fegan, 2010, p.11). Sexuality is an "adults-only" area children need protection from (Fegan, 2010, p.12). Therefore, understandings of sexuality are often linked to puberty, which results in the perception that prior to this time sexuality is either immature or does not even exist (Fegan, 2010, p.12). In sum, children are constructed as sexually innocent and sexually ignorant (Fegan, 2010, p.1).

However, this is not the case. There is an undeniable and significant disconnect between these constructions of childhood sexuality and what is actually known about the sexual behaviour of children. It is important to consider that the sexual behaviours children experience is not analogous to adults (Fegan, 2010, p.7). Nevertheless, much of the literature shows that young children demonstrate behaviours that indicate an awareness of sexuality (Fegan, 2010, p.1). Anke Ehrhardt, a psychologist and expert in children's sexual development at Columbia University's New York Psychiatric Institute, states that "children are always 'sexually active'" (Fegan, 2010, p.3). To illustrate, at birth boys are capable of having erections and girls' vaginas are capable of lubrication (Fegan, 2010, p.3). Between the age of four and six children can be outrageously flirtatious, seductive, and even engage in exhibitionist or voyeuristic activities as they impersonate parents, siblings or what they see in the media (Fegan, 2010, p.6). Interestingly, between the age of six and nine children are more likely to hide these behaviours as they become increasingly aware of cultural taboos (Fegan, 2010, p.7). 11 to 12-year-old children may talk about sex and look at pornographic images (Fegan, 2010, p.7). Some studies suggest that children even as young as 6 may have already seen porn (Fegan, 2010, p.7). Friedrich and

colleagues suggest that 40-75% of children will engage in some sexual behaviours before the age of 13 (Fegan, 2010, p.3).

In Fegan's (2010) dissertation titled, "Sexuality behaviours in the early childhood classroom: A qualitative study of K-2 teachers' experiences" she studies teachers' perceptions of sexuality-related behaviours in the classroom. More specifically, she asks teachers to share what sexual behaviours they have seen or heard comments and questions about from the students in their class. The teachers' responses relate to the major themes of the newly mandated sexuality program of the Quebec Education Program. Fegan's (2010) findings are exemplified below:

Emotional and romantic life

- 100% of the teachers reported that they have witnessed children in the classroom talk about boyfriends, girlfriends or dating (p.53).

Identity, gender stereotypes and roles, and social norms

- 70% of the teachers reported that they have been asked questions about the differences between boys and girls or men and women (p.39).
- 50% of the teachers reported that they have been asked questions about or heard comments about [sexual orientation] from their students (p.40).

Pregnancy and birth / Sexually transmissible and blood-borne infections (STBBIs) and pregnancy

- 90% of the teachers reported that they have been asked questions about pregnancy and 70% have been asked questions about where babies come from (p.39).

Sexual assault and sexual violence

- 30% of the teachers reported that they have been asked questions or been told things about rape or sexual abuse (p.40)

Sexual growth and body image

- 60% of the teachers said that they have been asked questions or heard comments about genitals or breasts (p.40).
- 90% of the teachers said they have observed children try to look when people are nude or undressing (p.53).

Sexual behaviour

- 30% of the teachers reported that they have heard children in the classroom make sexual sounds, such as sighs, moans, heavy breathing and their reactions depending on whether or not the children seemed to know they were sexual noises (p.40)

These statistics are just some of the many examples that exist. As Fegan (2010) notes, these results indicate that in a teacher's career he or she will encounter various sexuality-related behaviours in his or her young students (p.93). In addition, these findings "support the claim that sexuality is present in early childhood classrooms, regardless of how effectively it is understood or addressed" (Fegan, 2010, p.15).

Implications

It is apparent that putting forth that children are too innocent to engage with sexuality topics is an invalid and dangerous argument. Research reveals that young children do in fact display sexuality-related behaviours. Robinson and Davies contend that underestimating children's abilities to understand sexuality does not reflect the realities and complexities of their lives (Fegan, 2010, p.12). Young children are exposed to a variety of sexuality-related messages, images, and conversations every day. As a result, there seems to be a disconnect between what they see on a daily basis and what is deemed appropriate for them to reflect on and engage with.

Robinson and Davies add that regulating or silencing children's access to sexual knowledge may contribute to children's misinformation regarding sexuality and increase their vulnerability to sexual exploitation and abuse. It may also put their sexual health and well being at risk and even negatively impact their self-esteem (Fegan, 2010, p.13).

Research suggests that sexuality education is most effective when provided before a young person becomes sexually active. The benefit of receiving this type of education at an earlier age is that young people will already have a better understanding of sexuality before actually engaging in any sexual behaviors. These individuals will be able to make informed decisions around issues to do with sexuality. For instance, Debbie Ollis, a professor at Deakin University, points out this may involve making decisions on "being or not being sexually active; it may be around choices of contraception; it may be around issues to do with their sexual identity; it may be around issues to do with exploring the media's sexualization of young people or issues to do with pornography" (ABC Health & Well Being, 2013, para.22). Overall learning about sexuality in a developmentally appropriate manner ensures young people have the knowledge to engage in safer practices and, in turn, reduce sexual risk taking. Therefore, elementary school is a suitable environment for sexuality education to begin. According to Weaver et al. (2002), 65% of parents surveyed in the study felt that sexuality education should begin in elementary school. Similarly, Cohen & Byers (2004) found that most teachers (78%) thought sexuality education should start in elementary school (p.1). I also think that developmentally appropriate sexuality education should begin in elementary school.

Moreover, I believe it is interesting and important to look at the experiences of the teachers responsible for teaching a sexuality curriculum since it is their understanding of the curriculum that will influence how they interact with it and implement the curricular objectives.

Elementary school teachers are, in many ways, responsible for building the foundations of children's sexuality knowledge and understandings, which will be essential for students as they progress through a sexuality curriculum and life. Consequently, elementary school teachers are an interesting and often overlooked group to study as they balance discourses of childhood innocence and sexuality education curricular objectives. It is for these reasons that my research focuses uniquely on the elementary school sexuality curricula and the experiences of elementary school teachers.

Sexuality Education in Quebec

At present, there is little published research in the area of sexuality education in Canada (Morton Ninomiya, 2010, p.11). In Canada, education is a provincial responsibility; therefore, the federal government has little influence over SBSE (Joyce, 2015, p.25). As a result, the quality and quantity of sex education in Canada is insufficient and inconsistent (Illes, 2012, p.614). As McKay et al. (2014) note, with the exception of Quebec, all provincial and territorial ministries of education include some sexuality education in their curriculum.

Although SBSE initiatives stir up latent clashes of values, Quebec has made the progressive decision to educate and empower its youth and in 2018 implemented a newly mandated sexuality education curriculum, which begins in Kindergarten and extends through to secondary 5.

A Brief Historical Overview of Sexuality Education in Quebec

Quebec has a long and complicated history with sexuality education. Therefore, it is interesting to study the context of the institutionalization of sex education in the province. In her

dissertation on critical media literacy-based sex education programs for Quebec high schools, Garcia (2013) provides an insightful evaluation of the curriculum in Quebec. She begins her evaluation in the 1960s; a period in which she notes Quebec society, and the school system underwent profound transformation (p.27).

In the 1960s the province was a part of the Quiet Revolution, which led to the secularization of society and social institutions like schools (Garcia, 2013, p.27; Boucher, 2003, p.134). In 1964, the government created the Ministere de L'Education du Quebec (MEQ), which Garcia (2013) highlights led to the revamping and modernization of the school system (p.27).

Meanwhile, the 1960s also brought about the sexual revolution (Garcia, 2013, p.28). The sexual revolution is characterized by "pushing sex into the spotlight of the government, feminists and scholars" (Garcia, 2013, p.28). In fact, combined with the rise of sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies at the time, these factors led to the creation "of a branch of study called sexology in the newly opened Université du Quebec à Montreal in 1969" (Garcia, 2013, p.28). The goal of this program was to train educators to be available to teach sexology when it entered the schools (Garcia, 2013, p.28; Boucher, 2003, p.135). By 1972 the MEQ had designed an experimental sex education program (Garcia, 2013, p. 28). This program created conflict between scholars, parents, and members of religious groups (Garcia, 2013, p.28).

After years of public debate, a new sex education program, which was informed by moral and academic stakeholders, was released (Garcia, 2013, p.28). It was implemented within the Personal and Social Development (PSD) course in 1986 (Garcia, 2013, p.28). The PSD program provided a comprehensive and positive curriculum to students from secondary 3 to 5 in Quebec and covered broad themes such as health education, interpersonal relationships, life in society, and consumer education (Garcia, 2013, p.29). More specifically, it included in the sex education

component topics relating to "sexual attitudes and behaviours, pleasure, stereotypes, STIs and contraception" (Garcia, 2013, p.29). The program as a whole was given up to 25 hours of instruction a year (Garcia, 2013, p.29). Consequently, the actual amount of time dedicated to sex education varied (Garcia, 2013, p.29).

In her dissertation Garcia (2013) relies on research conducted by Arcand and Venne (1998) which studied the implementation of the PSD program in Laval schools (Garcia, 2013, p.29). They found that "all components of the sex education curriculum were not always taught in classrooms, and the discourse employed in teaching the PSD program predominantly focused on the biological aspects of sex" (Garcia, 2013, p.29). Arcand and Venne also criticized the lack of organization and time for preparation (Garcia, 2013, p.29).

Between the end of the 1970s and the mid-1980s, the school system was thoroughly evaluated (Garcia, 2013, p.30). As a result, it was a time that saw various recommendations and changes in the curriculum. For example, in 1979 the document *Schools of Quebec: Policy Statement and Plan of Action* (also called *The Orange Paper)* was published (Garcia, 2013, p.30). It provided an analysis of the situation in elementary and secondary schools and provided suggestions for a reform in schools that pushed for the personal growth and development of youth (Garcia, 2013, p.30). In 1981 the *Basic School Regulations* document prescribed "compulsory and optional subjects, subject time allocation and the format of the current programs of study" (Garcia, 2013, p.30). However, there were several objections to the reform and curriculum discussions shifted to look at the "more cognitive aspects of education, including knowledge of mathematics, languages, and sciences, rather than the personal development of youth" (Garcia, 2013, p.31). Finally, by 1997 proposals for the reform were submitted, including the report *Reaffirming the Mission of our School*s, produced by the Task Force on Curriculum

Reform (Garcia, 2013, p.32). This report recommended that several subjects should no longer be mandatory for students, including the PSD program (Garcia, 2013, p.30). Instead, they promoted interdisciplinary learning and suggested that the content of PSD programs be integrated into other subjects (Garcia, 2013, p.30). In the 2000-2001 academic year, elementary schools across the province shifted to this new curricular reform. In 2005-2006 high schools started the change as well. In summary, the Quebec education reform led to the disappearance of a mandatory sex education curriculum.

Sexuality Education & The Quebec Reform

The Quebec Education Program (QEP) reform was met with mixed reactions. On one hand, the QEP has merits as it created the opportunity for educators to implement more inclusive, comprehensive, holistic and interdisciplinary pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning (Garcia, 2013, p.44; Dowd, 2009, p.32). Garcia (2013) notes how this was "positive in terms of showing students how sexuality is embedded in all facets of our lives and learning" (p.44). She adds that since the reform some schools were able to successfully implement sex education initiatives inspired by the cross-curricular framework (Garcia, 2013, p.44). However, the success of this was largely dependent on the cooperation of the entire school community (Dowd, 2009, p.32). Since schools were responsible for developing and enacting their own programs, Garcia (2013) states "the sex education landscape in Quebec is varied" (p.46). Despite the success of some schools adjusting to the curricular reform, research reports reveal that the reform garnered significant criticism.

Parker & McGray (2015) highlight many of the inadequacies and inconsistencies of the reform, especially in regard to sexuality education. Many scholars, teachers, administrators, and

members of the Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers (QPAT) questioned if the reform guidelines were even realistic and relevant (Garcia, 2013, p.39). With the reform, sexuality education was no longer a standalone, mandatory course. A document entitled, *Sex Education in the Context of the Education Reform* for teachers suggested, but never made mandatory, several activities, projects, and learning situations (Parker & McGray, 2015, p.6). As such Parker & McGray (2015) note that with the poorly defined mandate to teach sexuality education in Quebec it should be no surprise to learn that teachers did not address it adequately or even at all (p.13). Although teaching sex education was part of the homeroom teacher's responsibilities, in Feldman's 2011 article, *Sex at School: Sex Education in Quebec,* a student shared that he had not received any sex education since the reform (Garica, 2013, p.10).

Dowd (2009) notes that, at the time, many educators were vastly unaware and uninformed of how the delivery of sexuality education would change as a result of curricular reform and how they were implicated in these adjustments (p.54). She goes on to further state that this is "hardly surprising taking into account no teachers had received any documentation concerning how the reform affected sexual health education" (Dowd, 2009, p.54). Parker & McGray (2015) share a similar story. Parker, a high school teacher, notes that he was never informed about his responsibility to incorporate sexuality education until a staff meeting one and a half years into his teaching career (Parker & McGray, 2015, p.4). The staff was reminded that it was everybody's job to teach sexuality education (Parker & McGray, 2015, p.4). However, he describes that "the announcement was rendered irrelevant by the eye-rolling and sarcastic smiles of the presenter and many staff members. The message was clear; teachers didn't take this task seriously, and neither did administrators or school boards" (Parker & McGray, 2015, p.4).

Garcia (2013) highlights that successful integration of the reform depended on the support received by the school community and network (p.46). Unfortunately, research findings indicated a need for greater support. For instance, QPAT states that the government did not provide adequate training for teachers to appropriately address reforms. Parker & McGray (2015) add that when professional development is offered it has been poor or sparsely implemented. They also suggest that teachers will most likely participate in professional development related to their core subject areas first. They question how teachers can find time to engage in additional professional development tasks when they are already "overburdened with heavy workloads, oversized classes, and extracurricular activities" (Parker & McGray, 2015, p.9).

Other reform critiques include the lack of teaching and learning resources, time constraints, the lack of information on procedures and evaluations, and the struggle to incorporate cooperative and interdisciplinary methods (Parker & McGray, 2015, p.9; Garcia, 2013, p.36). More specifically they noted the fragile partnerships between schools and public health practitioners who give sexuality education workshops (Parker & McGray, 2015, p.9). Combined these factors created a barrier to the successful implementation of the reform and ministerial guidelines in regard to sexuality education.

The 2018 Sexuality Curriculum & Implications

Quebec has seen many changes with regards to sexuality education. In recent years, the teaching of sexuality education has actually taken greater importance in the province (Parker & McGray, 2015, p.21). In fact, on December 8th, 2010 Line Beauchamp, the Quebec Education Minister, announced that "new reforms would reintroduce sex education into primary and

secondary schools in the province" (Feldman, 2011, para. 3). Therefore, since September 2018 the content defined by the ministry's sexuality education curriculum is compulsory for all elementary and secondary students at both private and public schools.

The Quebec curriculum proposes a broad, inclusive, and comprehensive approach to teach sexuality education from kindergarten to grade eleven. The ministry notes that "the various topics will be taught in an age-appropriate manner and instruction will foster the students' development and make them less vulnerable to certain problems" (MEES, para.4). The curriculum was designed in collaboration with experts in pedagogy, sexology, and health, and relies on recent research in sexuality education (MEES, para.5). The new curriculum mandates that students receive 5 to 15 hours of sexuality education per year (MEES, para.6). The themes covered are Sexual Growth and Body Image; Identity, Gender Stereotypes and Roles, and Social Norms; Emotional and Romantic Life; Sexual Assault; Pregnancy and Birth; Comprehensive View of Sexuality; Sexual Behaviour; Sexual Violence; Sexually Transmissible and Blood-Borne Infections (STBBIs) and Pregnancy.

The document entitled, "Detailed Content in Sexuality Education: Kindergarten & Elementary" by the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement Supérieur provides a comprehensive overview of the compulsory content in sexuality education. It also provides justification for why students need to learn each theme or specific content.

Quebec schools are in a unique position to ensure youth are receiving meaningful sexuality education; one which allows them to be empowered, sexual citizens. However, as Bay-Cheng (2003) notes it is not a simple task to analyze and construct a pedagogical program (p.62). Juniper Belshaw, a coordinator at Heads and Hands Montreal, reminds us "when sex education was in schools [in Quebec] there were shortcomings, so the fact that it might be back may not be

sufficient. We need to ask ourselves how sex education can be super-empowering and productive" (Feldman, 2011, para, 16). Therefore, it is important to recognize Quebec's history with sexuality education and acknowledge the critiques of previous reforms. In doing so, there is greater opportunity for a more successful early implementation of the 2018 compulsory sexuality education curriculum.

Teachers' Role in Curricular Change and Fidelity

Education policy and curricular reforms implicate various groups and can often be rife with tensions. However, although there are multiple stakeholders involved, educators must be considered the primary agents (Garcia, 2013, p.41). As Levenson and Hamilton (1989) highlight "implementation of educational innovations is ultimately accomplished by individuals, not institutions" (p.156). Similarly, Francine Duquet, a professor from the Sexology Department at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) and trainer for the Ministère de l'Éducation du Loisir et du Sport (MELS), adds that "teachers stand in the forefront of any implementation of sex education in schools" (Garcia, 2013, p.41). As such, the success of the newly mandated Quebec sexuality education curriculum largely depends on teachers' willingness to engage with and deliver the content of the program. In other words, the success or failure of the Quebec sexuality education curriculum rests with its teachers (LaChausse, Clark & Chapple, 2014, p.53).

LaChausse, Clark & Chapple (2014) explore the concept of "implementation fidelity", which they describe as "the degree to which teachers and other program providers implement programs as intended by the program developers" (p.53). They note that school-based sexuality programs are rarely implemented perfectly (LaChausse et al., 2014, p.53). Therefore, they sought

to examine how teacher characteristics affect program fidelity and even propose a comprehensive teacher training and professional development framework to increase program fidelity (LaChausse et al., 2014, p.53).

In addition to research by LaChausse et al (2014) and Levenson & Hamilton (1989), several other studies provide an insightful exploration of the many complex factors that may affect teachers' reactions toward a curriculum and, in turn, influence subsequent implementation and maintenance efforts (p.156). These well-cited factors include the lack of sexuality knowledge, training and education teachers receive; and educator variables such as sexuality-attitudes, comfort, and confidence teaching these topics.

Knowledge, Education & Training

Many non-specialist elementary and high school teachers in Canada are required to teach sexuality education, and often they are not prepared to teach these programs. The literature shows that teachers' perception of their sexual health knowledge is one barrier to providing school-based sexuality education. In fact, Cohen et al. (2012) found that teachers' perception of their knowledge about sexual health topics was the most important contributor to their willingness to teach sexuality education (p.311). Educators require considerable knowledge and skills specific to sex, sexuality and sexual health education (McKay & Barrett, 1999, p.92). Brushett (2007) emphasizes that for sexuality education to be effective, "teachers should be able to embrace the diversity of participants, have the capacity to discuss sexual health positively and in a sensitive manner, and be able to identify and understand participants' beliefs" (p.35).

However, research suggests that while many teachers consider it their responsibility to teach sexuality education there are many gaps in teachers' sexual health knowledge (Westwood

& Mullan, 2007, p.144). Westwood & Mullan (2007) conducted a study to assess the sexual health knowledge of secondary school teachers and to assess the attitudes of these teachers regarding sexual health education (p.143). The results were obtained from a questionnaire as part of a two-phase intervention study in central England; however, similar trends may be found in North America (Westwood & Mullan, 2007, p.143). The questionnaires were distributed specifically to evaluate teachers' knowledge of sexual health, contraception, and sexually transmitted infections, as well as teachers' attitudes on the subject of sex and relationships (Westwood & Mullan, 2007, p.143). Ultimately Westwood & Mullan (2007) questioned if teachers were adequately prepared to implement present government education and public health policies concerning SBSE (p.143). Although the teachers' general sexual health knowledge was good, the results suggest that teachers have insufficient knowledge regarding sexually transmitted infections and the use of the emergency oral contraceptive (Westwood & Mullan, 2007, p.153). For instance, 63% of respondents reported that they either do not have enough or have no information regarding sexually transmitted infections, and 43% lack information on contraception (Westwood & Mullan, 2007, p.149). Therefore, Westwood & Mullan (2007) propose that, at present, teachers do not have adequate specialist knowledge to meaningfully teach sexuality education and to prepare young students to negotiate sexual relationships (p.153).

Teachers' poor knowledge of sexuality and sexual health topics may be explained by the lack of sexual health education and training they receive during their undergraduate teaching program and during their professional careers (Garcia, 2015, p.200). According to the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) guidelines "sexuality education should be taught by specially trained teachers who...must receive training in human

sexuality, including the philosophy and methodology of sexuality education" (Fegan, 2010, p.20). Despite that recommendation, when SIECUS surveyed 169 colleges and universities that provide undergraduate training for teachers in the United States, they found that none of the schools surveyed have a required sexuality education course for pre-service teachers (Fegan, 2010, p.21). Similar results have been found with Canadian universities. In Canada, the curricula for most Bachelor of Education programs for students majoring in either elementary or secondary education does not include required, or even elective, sexual health education courses (Cohen et al., 2012, p.300). A study by McKay & Barrett (1999) examined the pre-service sexual health education training of elementary, secondary, and physical health education teachers in Canadian faculties of education. They found that, on average, 15.5% of the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programs surveyed provided compulsory training in sexual health education (McKay & Barrett, 1999, p.91). They also found that 26.2% of the programs offered optional courses with sexuality education content; however, only an estimated one-third of their B.Ed. students took these courses (McKay & Barrett, 1999, p.98). These courses did not necessarily deal with "how to teach" sexuality education, and, in general, emphasized "traditional" topics in this field (McKay & Barrett, 1999, p.98). Overall, McKay & Barrett (1999) found that the number of programs with compulsory or optional sexuality education courses available was 39.3% ranging from 32.4% of elementary education to 52.4% in physical and health education (p.98). In the province of Quebec, Garcia (2015) found that only one Bachelor of Education program out of nine offered an optional sexuality course (p.200). Garcia (2015) explains that "the MEQ and MSSS guidelines do not acknowledge the roles of universities in preparing pre-service teachers for their possible future roles teaching sexual health education" (p.201). However, because of this, we miss the opportunity to "provide systematic training in the theory

and practice of sexual health education at the earliest point in a potential teacher's training" (McKay & Barrett, 1999, p.100).

In order to deliver consistently high-quality sexuality education in schools, teachers must receive appropriate education and training to implement these programs—tasks that could be best achieved through B.Ed. programs. Garcia (2015) states that "effectively training sex education teachers extends beyond simple content...it should address issues of discomfort, ethical problems, bias, personal values, and provide educators with tools they can use in the classroom." (p.53). She goes on to say that "topics such as sexual diversity, healthy sexual behaviours within marginalized members of the community, including Aboriginals, students with disabilities and students originating from lower socio-economic strata of society, need to be to be addressed to promote an inclusive sex education curriculum" (Garcia, 2015, p.53). Literature suggests teacher education is key to making sexuality education "reflective, critical and transformative" (Morton Ninomiya, 2008, p.113).

At present, formal sexuality training is not occurring at most faculties of education at Canadian universities and elsewhere (McKay & Barrett, 1999, p.100). Considering students from these programs may eventually be responsible for teaching the sexuality education, it is alarming how relatively few programs include such training as part of their compulsory course credit. In their study of pre-service teachers' SBSE experiences, Goldman & Coleman (2013) used biographical narratives to analyze the views of fourth year (primary) Bachelor of Education student-teachers in Queensland "about their own primary school puberty/sexuality education, their present university professional education for teaching these subjects, and their intentionality to teach them to future Grade 6 school students" (p.276). While interviewing pre-service teachers about their intent and preparedness to teach SBSE Goldman & Coleman (2013) received

responses such as, “My degree has not prepared or even influenced me at all to teach it, it’s kind of scary” (p.278). Another participant reported, “I haven’t been taught anything about how to teach it at uni really, I wish I had been, then it wouldn’t be such a stress if I was to have to teach it” (Goldman & Coleman, 2013, p.278). Paradoxically, Goldman & Coleman (2013) note that most of these student-teachers are aware of the need, importance and benefits of comprehensive SBSE (p.286).

When teachers are not adequately educated or trained to teach the mandates of a sexuality curriculum they may rely on personal experience. The glimpse into the biographical narratives of the student-teachers Goldman & Coleman (2013) interviewed illustrates this. The results of the study show that these students intend to replicate their own primary school learning experiences (Goldman & Coleman, 2013, p.276). Consequently, we risk replicating outdated and narrow sexuality education frameworks. In light of this, Goldman and Coleman (2013) assert that university education “appears to have failed to operationalize the contemporary learning and teaching of puberty/sexuality education that would allow a new generation of more effective knowledge and pedagogies to be implemented”. (p.276).

The problem continues as much of the published literature surrounding sexuality education and training identifies that Canadian in-service teachers often receive little or no training. This is exemplified by Cohen & Byers (2004) as they found only one-half of Canadian school districts regularly offer in-service training in sexuality education, and only one-third of teachers reported having participated in the training (p.2). That means over 65% of the participants reported having had no training for such teaching. However, 81% of respondents were interested in training (Morton Ninomiya, 2010, p.22).

In Quebec, there are a few sexuality training workshops offered through the school board; however, they are sporadically offered and can be difficult to attend (Joyce, 2015, p.49). For instance, since these workshops are offered through the school board and not the ministry of education there is an inconsistency regarding which schools and teachers actually have the privilege of attending. Moreover, it is difficult for teachers to attend these training sessions because of the lack of funding for release time (Joyce, 2015, p.49). Similarly, when these workshops are offered during Pedagogical Days there are often other mandatory meetings or workshops during the same time that may be more closely related to the teachers' interests, teachable subject, or practical needs (Joyce, 2015, p.49).

A study conducted by LaChausse et al. (2014) examined the role of these professional development sessions in maintaining curriculum fidelity (p.56). They sought to propose a comprehensive teacher training and professional development structure to increase program fidelity (LaChausse et al., 2014, p.56). They thought some teacher characteristics could be enhanced during curriculum training, and, in turn, encourage teachers to meaningfully implement and enact a new curriculum (LaChausse et al., 2014, p.56). They found that "a 2-day teacher training may not adequately address teacher facilitation skills or the maintenance of institutional supports for implementing a program with fidelity and quality" (LaChausse et al., 2014, p.56). Keeping this in mind, I consider the sexuality training provided to in-service teachers. Many of these workshops in Quebec last merely a few hours or a day. Consequently, it is clear these training efforts are not substantial.

Alex McKay from the Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN) is quoted saying that "if sexual health is to be effective, it needs to be provided by people who have some specialized training. It is not something that you can just hand over to the chemistry

teacher, just as you wouldn't ask him to teach English literature" (Morton Ninomiya, 2008, p.77). It should be no surprise then that teachers themselves claim inadequate training and institutional support (Goldman & Coleman, 2013, p.278). In addition, these teachers also report that they do not perceive themselves as professionally competent to deliver the sexuality curriculum provided by the ministry of education (Fegan, 2010, p.22).

Implications.

There is an undeniable deficit of pre-service and in-service sexuality education and training for teachers. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore Quebec elementary school teachers' recent experiences teaching the sexuality curriculum, especially in light of the education and training they have reported. I argue that the success of the newly mandated sexuality program in Quebec relies on a contingency of factors which cannot necessarily be accounted for at the level of educational policy and curricular design. This may include teacher specific characteristics related to sexuality knowledge, education, and training; comfort teaching sexuality topics; willingness to teach sexuality education; and teacher perceived limitations and supports. Combined these factors come together to inform how teachers are interacting with the curriculum and reacting to their new role as sexuality educators.

Teachers' Attitudes, Comfort & Confidence

How teachers implement a curriculum will be influenced by their attitudes towards it. As a result, some research studies seek to investigate teachers' attitudes towards SBSE. In a review of the effectiveness of sexual health programs at reducing unprotected sex among adolescents, Kirby "concluded that a distinguishing characteristic of effective curricula is that the teachers

believe in the program they are implementing" (Cohen & Byers, 2004, p.2). Therefore, "positive attitudes and motivation are paramount in the introduction of measures to provide effective sex education in schools" (Garcia, 2013, p.51).

As Cohen & Byers (2004) articulate it is likely that teachers' attitudes towards a sexuality education curriculum will influence their coverage of various sexual health topics, as well as their teaching methods (p.2). Problematically, this means that uncomfortable teacher attitudes often leave students with little to no sexuality education. Cohen & Sears (2012) found that most Canadian teachers surveyed viewed SBSE as important and believed it should start in elementary school (p.311). However, research also suggests that teachers may support SBSE in general, and yet still not teach the entire sexuality curriculum (Cohen & Byers, 2004, p.2). In other words, teachers may be willing to teach some sexuality topics more than others (Cohen & Sears, 2012, p.301).

In their comprehensive study of the importance of sex education topics and teacher characteristics, Yarber & McCabe (1984) asked high school health science teachers to rate the importance of 60 sex education topics (p.37). Relationships between these importance ratings and personal characteristics of the teachers, such as age, sex, political views, and attitudes toward their own sexuality were examined (Yarber & McCabe, 1984, p.37). Relationships between the importance ratings and whether the topic was included in instruction were also investigated (Yarber & McCabe, 1984, p.37). Yarber & McCabe (1984) articulate that the intent of this is to address "the possibility that even though a topic may be considered important by curriculum planners, it may receive minimal or no classroom discussion because of mitigating conditions, such as potential controversial nature of the topic" (p.37).

The results indicate that teachers' attitude toward their own sexuality is an important predictor of topic importance (Yarber & McCabe, 1984, p.40). For instance, teachers with the most positive attitude indicated greater importance for many of the topics, even the controversial ones (Yarber & McCabe,1984, p.40). In addition, the findings reveal that only one teacher variable, namely erotiphilia-erotophobia, was consistently related to the importance rating (Yarber & McCabe, 1984, p.38). For nearly every instance, the erotophilics viewed the topic to be more important than the erotophobics (Yarber & McCabe, 1984, p.38). The areas that were rated the most important overall related to the biological aspects of sexuality and sexual health and are probably the least controversial topics (Yarber & McCabe, 1984, p.38). However, Yarber & McCabe (1984) note that topic importance did not necessarily mean the topic was included in instruction (p.40). In fact, they found that while most topics were rated to be quite important, many were taught by fewer than 50% of the teachers surveyed (Yarber & McCabe, 1984, p.40).

The results of the study are congruent with much of the literature, which shows that most Canadian teachers cover non-controversial topics such as puberty and reproduction (Cohen & Sears, 2012, p.301). Median responses from Cohen & Byers (2004) study indicate that the teacher participants felt somewhat comfortable teaching sexual health topics like communicating about sex; birth control and safe sex practices; and sexual coercion and sexual assault (p.1). Conversely, the topics the least emphasized across all programs are sexual orientation, sexual pleasure, orgasm, masturbation, and sex toys (Morton Ninomiya, 2008, p.69). This list of topics concurs with other studies on what teachers are least likely to cover in SBSE (Morton Ninomiya, 2008, p.69; McKay & Barrett, 1999, p.96; Cohen & Sear, 2012, p.301). These findings should come as no surprise given that the general public is not usually comfortable discussing these topics either. How should we expect untrained teachers to feel comfortable and confident

teaching these ‘controversial’ topics, especially when they face the added risk of being reprimanded by parents who may not want these topics taught. This is one of the complexities of implementing SBSE—it is a balancing act of providing students with what they need and what other adults want for them. I suggest it is important for the curriculum to be comprehensive and inclusive and omitting or censoring information obscures the main curricular objective of creating informed and empowered sexual citizens. Therefore, it is important to ensure teachers are comfortable and confident with all facets of the curriculum. In doing so, they may set an example to students, other educators and administrators, parents, and community members on how we can comfortably engage in meaningful, critical discussions normalizing topics deemed ‘taboo’ or controversial, such as those from the aforementioned studies.

Teachers’ comfort in teaching sexuality topics largely affects the topics they actually include in instruction. Consequently, much of the literature highlights teacher comfort as an important variable to study. In some cases, comfort may affect the depth, detail, and emphasis a sexuality topic receives (Morton Ninomiya, 2010, p.22). For instance, LaChausse et al. (2014) found that teacher comfort was a significant predictor of lesson quality (p.55). Another body of research that also examines this is by Langille et al. (2001), whose research examines the barriers to SBSE. The participants, a group of female high school students, proclaim teacher discomfort as one of these barriers (Langille, et al., 2001, p.252). The participants shared occasions when they noticed teachers were visibly uncomfortable and avoided discussing sexuality topics or material. They noted the following signs: “avoidance of using proper terminology (e.g. penis) in favour of awkward and less specific terms (e.g. private parts); turning away from the class when speaking; not answering questions; and avoidance of certain topics” (Langille et al., 2001, p.252).

Discomfort is a barrier that impedes communication about sexuality topics. Consequently, it not only influences what topics are taught and to what extent, but it may also impact teachers' responses to students' sexuality questions. A survey administered to a random sample of fifth and sixth-grade teachers assessed their willingness to answer sexuality-related questions from their students (Fegan, 2010, p.24). The teachers' reported willingness to answer these questions in front of the class varied greatly (73% to 14%) depending on the content of the question (Fegan, 2010, p.24). The findings pertain to other sexuality research, which notes that young children today seem to have more explicit questions, which arises from their natural curiosity and desire to learn (Fegan, 2010, p.24).

Similar to comfort, teacher confidence or self-efficacy is an important variable that mediates teachers' willingness to teach SBSE. Teacher confidence is a central factor in the delivery of effective sexuality education. Teacher's confidence and comfort levels when teaching SBSE are correlated to their perception of the attendant risks of teaching such a curriculum (Bialystok, 2019, p.9). These well-cited teacher perceived barriers include; fear of disapproval or upsetting parents and community groups; poor administrative support; limited access to outside help such as public health nurses and facilitators; insufficient sexuality knowledge, education, and training; dissatisfaction with curriculum and curricular resources; poorly defined or differing perceptions of "success" and assessment tools; lack of enthusiasm for teaching this subject; and discomfort or embarrassment with certain topics (Bialystok, 2019, p.9; Cohen & Sears, 2012, p.302; Morton Ninomiya, 2010, p.22; Fegan, 2010, p.20). Parker & McGray (2015) pose some thoughtful questions, such as "what should teachers do when parents and administrators show resistance to queer sexuality being incorporated into the sexuality curriculum? What if the librarians or school board computer technicians set Internet filters on school computers, limiting

LGBTQ sites, making the World Wide Web fit into a heteronormative world view?" (p.10). These are obstacles that exist in schools and require confidence to overcome. As a result, the factors mentioned above have the potential to impede teachers' confidence and, in turn, their willingness to teach SBSE.

Implications.

The quality and content of effective SBSE clearly depends on the educator and is mediated by set teacher characteristics such as their attitudes, comfort, and confidence. Research studies "observe the positive correlation between teachers who are excited about implementing reform guidelines and the innovative ideas they brought to the classroom" (Garcia, 2013, p.52). However, considering the 2001 educational reform in Quebec was met with frustration and feelings of disempowerment as teachers were tasked with putting theory into practice with little information and support to rely on, it is especially important to explore teachers' thoughts and experiences regarding the recently mandated sexuality curriculum. It is important to gather anecdotal evidence of teacher-identified strengths and limitations during these province-wide, initial phases. As the review of the literature suggests, if teachers have a positive attitude, and feel comfortable and confident teaching sexuality education they will do this more meaningfully and willingly. Consequently, this research study serves to shed light on the factors that may influence Quebec teachers' willingness to teach SBSE. The results of the study may warrant that further attention and effort be provided to ensure all teachers are confident and comfortable with their new role as sexuality educators.

Conclusion

Despite the increasing demand for non-specialist teachers in Canada to teach sexuality education in the classroom, research suggests that educators continually express some trepidation at doing so (Fegan, 2010, p.23; Cohen & Sears, 2012, p.299). This literature review thoroughly examined sexuality education discourses, as well as teachers' perceptions of teaching sexuality education. More specifically, this literature review explored the contributions of sexuality knowledge, education and training; and teachers' attitudes, comfort, and confidence on their willingness to deliver sexuality education. Teachers' willingness to teach sexuality education is strongly affected by their degree of preparation and their attitude towards the curriculum (Bialystok, 2019, p.9). Therefore, the quality and content of sexuality education programs are clearly contingent on the educator. Yet "teachers' views are seldom consulted either during the development of educational policy or in the aftermath of its introduction" (Bialystok, 2019, p.4). There is surprisingly little research exploring schoolteachers' thoughts on sexuality education. As Bialystok (2019) highlights this is problematic since, "compared with other stakeholders, teachers are often the most attuned to the sexual education needs of their students, as well as the actual impacts of curriculum" (p.4).

I believe canvassing teachers' experiences teaching sexuality education, such as the curriculum in Quebec, may reveal insights that are unique from the standpoint of the ministers of education, curriculum designers, parents and community members (Bialystok, 2019, p.4). This study will explore some of the previous key tensions, as identified in the literature review, that implementing SBSE brings about. For instance, that is "how to develop the comfort and confidence required to teach about [sexuality] in a context when there is little opportunity to reflect, explore and engage in pedagogies of [sexuality education] in pre-service teacher

education, and when few resources are available to support this practice" (Ollis, 2015, p.320). There is a need to understand how educators are experiencing and implementing the recently mandated sexuality curriculum in Quebec. It is important to gain a better understanding of what teachers believe is working well and what they think needs improvement (Dowd, 2009, p.4). As Dowd (2009) articulates, "in understanding better these realities, it will be possible to make suggestions for improvement or continued focus" (p.4).

Consequently, in light of the review of the existing literature, the purpose of this research is three-fold. First, the aim of this study is to examine the critiques of the Quebec sexuality curriculum made by those working in the field—teachers! (Lamb, 2010, p.83). Second, majority of the research in sexuality education has sampled American teachers, since research in this field is still relatively new in Canada (Cohen & Byers, 2004, p.2). Canada has a different social and political climate, which suggests that Canadian teachers are likely to have different views about sexuality education than American teachers (Cohen & Byers, 2004, p.2). As such, this study will contribute to the growing body of sexuality research taking place in Canada and, Quebec in particular. Finally, while there is extensive literature around SBSE for adolescents, there have been fewer studies that focus on the sexuality education given to primary school children. This study will fill that gap as it focuses uniquely on the experiences of elementary school teachers, and, thus, provides timely insight into an often-overlooked category of educators being asked to deliver sexuality education. The findings of this study will add new knowledge to the existing literature. The overall aim of the study is to use this information in consultation with educators, faculties of education and provincial ministries of education to formulate recommendations on how to best support the implementation of the sexuality curriculum in Quebec. As Bialoyk (2019) states, "research tracking teachers' experiences and attitudes teaching the sexuality

curriculum should be ongoing and complemented by critical analysis of the evolving public discourse" (p.31).

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Introduction

This chapter will outline the main theoretical frameworks of my research, and the relationship between these frameworks. It will begin with an exploration of curriculum theory, especially in relation to school-based comprehensive sexuality education. This section connects to the design, implementation, and evaluation of sexuality curricula specifically within the institution of elementary education. It is the primary theoretical piece necessary to situate my research. This is followed by a discussion on the theory of planned behaviour. This section is critical in proving the usefulness and validity of teachers' perspectives and experiences within my research, namely that teachers' beliefs are significant contributors to behavioral intention and, therefore, provide meaningful insight into curriculum implementation and change. Finally, reflective theory and practice is used to bridge the important aspects of curriculum theory and the theory of planned behaviour. Additionally, this section connects the three theoretical frameworks to the purpose of this research. Curriculum theory, the theory of planned behaviour, and reflexive theory and practice are used to unpack how teachers' beliefs and attitudes are precursors to successful curricular implementation. Curriculum theory and the theory of planned behaviour posit that if teacher's beliefs and attitudes are not taken into account, educational reforms or changes are likely fail. Reflective and reflexive practices are needed to uncover these personal beliefs and identify teacher-perceived supports and limitations to curricular implementation. These theoretical frameworks also directly show the merit of the methodological approach(s), which are defined and explained in detail in the next chapter (Chapter 3).

Curriculum Theory

A Brief Overview

What is curriculum theory? Informed by theory in the humanities, arts, and interpretive social sciences, curriculum theory as simply defined by Pinar (2004), is "the scholarly effort to understand the curriculum" (p.2). Here, he conceives the curriculum as a "complicated conversation" with what is, has been and might be (Pinar, 2004, p.2). In the field of education, the curriculum is characterized by dynamic, spirited, and informed communications between scholars or educators and students (Pinar, 2004, p.2). Consequently, Pinar (2004) asserts that curriculum theory is focused on the "educational experience" from which one can learn (p.2).

Synthesizing the work of Pinar (2004) and Carter (2017), Tissenbaum (2019) describes curriculum theory as "the academic discourse centred around understanding the holistic curriculum (the written curriculum versus the lived curriculum) through the investigation of the experiences of both students and instructors and attempts to identify factors effecting curriculum creation and delivery" (p.44).

Pinar's definition and work emphasizes the significance of subjectivity to education and curriculum theory. He recognizes that there is a valuable personal or subjective quality to curriculum and curriculum theory. Carter extends on this idea as she summarizes the key teachings from distinguished curriculum theorists and applauds them for how they "continue to re/conceptualize the curriculum as dynamic, autobiographical, experiential, reflective, and personal rather than fixed, prescriptive and standardized" (Carter, 2017, p. 71; Tissenbaum, 2019, p.44). As such, Tissenbaum (2019) states, "there is not necessarily a single definition of curriculum and that the curriculum itself, along with its definitions, is fluid and consistently

changing, therefore the concept of curriculum needs to be continually revisited and reconsidered" (p.44).

What is the function of curriculum theory? The simplest function of curriculum theory is to "serve as a directive force for curriculum theorists in the advancement of knowledge in the curriculum field" (Beauchamp, 1982, p.27). Well-developed curriculum theories can be used by practitioners to plan, use, and evaluate curricula in the school setting (Beauchamp, 1982, p.27). In fact, that is the main intent of my research. My research is informed by curriculum theory to assess the supports and barriers of implementing the new sexuality curriculum in Quebec primary schools.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education Curricula

As articulated by Tissenbaum (2019) curriculum can be understood cyclically given that "the dominant social understandings will influence the curriculum, and the curriculum will (re)enforce and (re)produce those social understandings" (p.45). Evidently, this applies to the dominant cultures' beliefs and understandings of sexuality. Consequently, it is important to survey and explore the existing discourses and approaches that inform and permeate school-based sexuality education curricula in Canada and Quebec in particular.

In her paper, "Saving rhetorical children: sexuality education discourses from conservative to post-modern" Jones (2011) provides an insightful "discourse exemplar for understanding the broad range of sexuality education discourses currently at work in education policies and policy movements" (p.369). She and other scholars highlight that two main ideological perspectives appear most often in the North American literature regarding sexuality education and they are conservative and comprehensive approaches (Jones, 2011, p.369;

Shannon, 2016, p.575). These orientations are frequently depicted as binary and inform the debates that take place between liberal and conservative "factions" (Shannon, 2016, p.575).

Conservative approaches privilege "traditional" views of sexuality (Shannon, 2016, p.574). For example, in this model sex, gender, and sexuality exist in what Jones (2011) refers to as "a fixed bi-polar opposition [in which] one is either feminine heterosexual female or a masculine heterosexual male" (p.374). Therefore, themes and concepts of heteronormativity and homogeneity are normalized, and anything that disrupts this is rendered invisible or pathologized. Most experts in sexuality education condemn conservative orientations for being too risk-focused and biology-focused. In Lamb's (2010) critique of sexuality education, she relies on one argument made by feminist critics. They assert that sexuality education that is too risk-focused makes sexuality "always problematic and dangerous and necessitating crisis management" (Lamb, 2010, p.86). Furthermore, conservative approaches are critiqued for being too biology orientated. Yarber and McCabe (1984) articulate that sexuality programs that focus primarily on the biological dimensions fail to meet many of the needs of young people.

Conversely, comprehensive sexuality education is often proclaimed as the "gold standard" of inclusive, progressive, and secular sexuality approaches within the literature (Shannon, 2016, p.576). Given that this discourse largely informs the Quebec sexuality curriculum it is imperative and timely to present operational definitions and concepts of comprehensive sexuality education.

Comprehensive sexuality education encompasses a holistic view of sexuality and sexual behaviours (UNFPA, 2015, p.11). Informed by tenets of queer and critical theory, comprehensive sexuality education is a "rights-based" and "gender-focused" approach that is committed to challenging cis-gendered, heteronormative assumptions and power relations

(UNFPPA, 2015, p.11). Comprehensive sexuality orientations aim to foster norms and attitudes that promote gender equality and inclusion and address vulnerabilities and exclusion by incorporating an intersectional lens, which seeks to critically understand how race, class, ability, gender, sexuality, and other sources of oppression intersect (UNFPA, 2015, p.11; Elia & Eliason, 2010, p.30). The delivery of comprehensive school-based sexuality education involves "teachers acting as facilitators in students' development of knowledge and skills; particularly relating to [critical thinking], inquiry and decision-making" (Jones, 2011, p.374). The goal of this model is to equip and educate children and young people with the perceived requisite knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that are necessary to develop a positive view of sexuality and that are essential in making decisions that may pertain to themes of "pleasure, personal preference, safety, readiness, equality, engagement in relationships, or values" and that are 'best' fit for the individual (Jones, 2011, p.374; UNFPA, 2015, p.11). Comprehensive sexuality education curricula are age-appropriate and "developmentally progressive with the increasing choice available at different stages of the individual's maturity" (Jones, 2011, p.374). Comprehensive approaches are long-term, formative learning processes that engage with and recognize students' needs (UNFPA, 2015, p.7). "When started early and provided over a long period of time, CSE [comprehensive sexuality education] empowers young people to make informed decisions regarding their sexuality and sexual behaviour, and to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens in school, the community and society at large" (UNFPA, 2015, p.11).

According to Jones (2011), comprehensive sexuality education is not without fault as she claims there is no consensus on what specifically constitutes comprehensive approaches (p.577). However, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) rebuts stating "that while we may have different perspectives and different names for 'comprehensive sexuality education', overall, there

is more agreement among the participating organizations and experts on what forms the basic principles of CSE and an essential minimum package" (UNFPA, 2015, p.11). As reflected by the UNFPA (2015) and the "Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe" there is agreement that comprehensive sexuality education includes "attention to human rights, the right to self-determination, gender equality and acceptance of diversity" (p.7). These tenets are also expressed in the spirit of the Quebec sexuality curriculum.

Curriculum Theory Critiques

A current critique by several curriculum theorists is that the creation and delivery of curriculum movements are overwhelmingly initiated through top-down approaches by trendy policymakers (Haney et al., 1996, p.986). In doing so, the curriculum is split from instruction (Pinar, 2004, p.32). In turn, curricula are "constructed to serve specific societal outcomes" (i.e., meaningfully contributing to a capitalist economy") (Tissenbaum, 2019, p.44) and the school itself becomes what Pinar (2004) refers to as a "skill-and-knowledge factory or corporation" (p.3). Since teachers and educators have little jurisdiction over the official school curriculum it simply becomes content to be learned and no longer a professional concern (Pinar, 2004, p.32). Teachers are reduced to the role or status of technicians and supervisory personnel (Pinar, 2004, p.3). Pinar (2004) and Carter (2014) proclaim that as a result of this, "curiosity, creativity, imagination, and joy [have been eliminated] from the educational environment and the curriculum itself" (Tissenbaum, 2019, p.44). In response, many curriculum theorists advocate that we encourage these qualities within and throughout the curriculum (Tissenbaum, 2019, p.44). Similarly, curriculum theorists might "assist teachers to avoid the disappearance of their ideals into the maelstrom of daily classroom demands" (Pinar, 2004, p.30).

Beauchamp (1982) puts forth that the following predictive relationship propositions that are essential for the advancement of knowledge in the curriculum field:

1. "If the arena for planning and implementing the curriculum is the same, curriculum engineering is markedly facilitated."
2. "If planning groups include classroom teachers who must use the curriculum, implementation is greatly facilitated."
3. "A reciprocal relationship exists between the selection of people to be involved in curriculum planning and the choice of the arena within which the curriculum is to be utilized" (p.26).

Curriculum theory recognizes the value of the teachers as educators, facilitators, research practitioners, and curriculum theorists. Unfortunately, the role of the teacher as a curriculum maker and evaluator has not been reflected in public policymaking in recent history and that may explain the shortcomings in the implementation of certain curricula, such as the sexuality education programs (Pinar et al., 1995, p.14; UNFPA, 2015, p.13)

My research strives to change this by providing teachers with the opportunity to engage in these roles while discussing the new sexuality curriculum in Quebec. I argue that in order "to fully understand the scope, coverage, and quality of [comprehensive sexuality education] content and program implementation" (UNFPA, 2015, p.30) we must rely on the "on-the-ground implementers"—the teachers! (Tichnor-Wagner, 2019, p.20). Sellars (2012) states that teachers are "the most powerful, durable, and effective agents of educational change...not the policymakers, the curriculum developers or even the educational authorities themselves" (p.462)

Given Pinar's (2004) definition of curriculum as a complicated conversation, curriculum theory contends that schoolteachers must be active participants in these conversations (p.33).

This means they cannot be simple "consumers" of knowledge (Pinar, 2004, p.33). Rather, teachers must share an active role in the planning, implementing, and evaluation processes.

To avoid the mistakes or limitations associated with previous provincial curricular changes or reforms, it is necessary to identify the barriers and support systems in place and assess implementation efforts. The evaluation of comprehensive sexuality education curricula is often done using qualitative methods (UNFPA, 2015, p.14). Consequently, curriculum theory, especially in relation to comprehensive sexuality education, directly supports my research methodologies.

Aligning Curricular Change and Teachers

Curriculum change is complex. It necessitates more than simply designing and introducing a curriculum at a school, district or national level. It requires the support of the teachers who are being asked to use these guidelines in their everyday professional practice.

To attain the desired outcomes of a curriculum requires educators to implement the curriculum as prescribed and to "adapt the curriculum to the needs of their local context while adhering to its core principles" (Tichnor-Wagner, 2019, p.3). However, as Fullan suggests, implementation is a variable (Zhao et al., 2020, p.1). The degree and quality to which a curriculum is implemented and achieves its desired outcomes rest not on how well the curricular ideas are written in the documents, but on the quality of its teachers. In sequence, the quality of teachers depends on the systems in place to support them (Tichnor-Wagner, 2019, p.23).

The reality is teachers practice "in the closed environment of their own classrooms" and rely almost totally on their own unique "capacity to interpret, understand, and perform the role of a teacher as mandated by these documents, whilst simultaneously making spontaneous decisions

and attending to the inevitable classroom interactions that cannot be planned for" (Sellars, 2012, p.462). Without specifically conducting research with teacher participants, it is nearly impossible to assume how the curriculum is being used, understood and implemented, and what teachers believe is supporting and hindering their curriculum implementation efforts. My research asks precisely those questions!

To add to the complexity, Sellars (2012) states that teachers as "individuals bring unique understandings, personal values, and varying degrees of competencies to their acknowledgement of, and dedication to, these documents in practice" (p.462). Therefore, investigations examining teachers' belief structures in regard to SBSE are needed to guide current implementation efforts into lasting and meaningful change (Haney et al., 1996, p.972).

Applying the Theory of Planned Behavior to Curriculum Change

Currently, evidence is lacking on how educators perceive the teaching of sexuality education. This particular study was designed to identify and examine the factors associated with teachers' intentions to comply with and implement the Quebec sexuality education curriculum (Haney et al., 19996, p.975). In order to do so, a "research model capable of identifying the beliefs linked to implementation was needed" (Haney et al., 1996, p.975). Azjen's (1985) theory of planned behavior is used as the theoretical framework of the study as it appropriately captures the precursors to classroom teaching behaviours.

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) has been widely used in the social sciences to predict and explain behaviour or the intention to perform a behaviour. For instance, it has been used in studies that discuss problem drinking, leisure behaviour, condom use, etc. Recently, TPB's application in education research is expanding (Zhao et al., 2020, p.2). TPB has been used

to explain teachers' adoption of new pedagogical practices and curricula (Guerin et al, 2019, p.550). Other studies have examined its effectiveness in exploring the relationship between teachers' behaviours and beliefs, which provides a wealth of information "that is extremely useful in any attempt to understand these behaviours or to implement interventions that will be effective in changing them" (Azjen, 1991, p.206).

Referring to the TPB framework, the purpose of this study was to determine the factors teachers identify as influencing their intention, attitude and ability to implement or continue to implement the newly mandated sexuality curriculum in Quebec primary schools. Azjen (1991) states that "intentions are assumed to capture the motivational factors that influence a behaviour; they are indications of how hard people are willing to try, of how much of an effort they are planning to exert, in order to perform the behaviour" (p.181).

The theory of planned behaviour postulates three conceptual determinants or variables that are needed to predict intention and behaviour (Azjen, 1991, p.188; Haney et al., 1996, p.974). They include the attitude toward the behaviour, the subjective norm, and the perceived behavioural control (Haney et al., 1996, p.974).

The attitude toward the behaviour refers to "the degree to which a person has a favourable or unfavourable evaluation or appraisal of the behaviour in question" (Azjen, 1991, p.189). It includes the individual's salient beliefs "that reflect the extent to which the individual believes that engaging in the behaviour will lead to favourable outcomes" and, therefore, represents a personal or subjective component (Haney et al., 1996, p.974). Azjen (1991) reported that attitudes are the primary indicators of an individual's intent to perform a behaviour (p.31).

Subjective norms refer to "the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behaviour" (Azjen, 1991, p.188). It represents a social component and addresses "the extent to

which the individual believes that other people, important to his or her life, think the behaviour should be performed" (Haney et al., 1996, p.974).

Finally, perceived behaviour control refers to "the perceived ease or difficulty of performing a behaviour" (Zhao et al., 2020, p.4). It includes the salient beliefs regarding the resources and obstacles that either facilitate or impede engagement in the behaviour (Haney et al., 1996, p.974). According to Haney et al. (1996) perceived behaviour control "reflects the individuals' perceptions regarding how the behaviour is complicated by internal (skill, ability, and knowledge) and external (resources, opportunity and cooperation) factors" (p.974).

These investigations show that "an individual's behaviour is strongly influenced by their confidence in their ability to perform it" and, in turn, relates to Bandura's concept of perceived self-efficacy (Haney et al., 1996, p.974; Azjen, 1991, p.184). In regard to teaching, self-efficacy beliefs can influence what topics, materials, or pedagogical practices are used, how much effort is expended during implementation and even the teachers' comfort levels enacting these lessons.

As a general rule, "the more favourable the attitude and subjective norm with respect to a behaviour, and the greater the perceived behavioural control, the stronger should be an individual's intention to perform the behaviour under consideration" (Azjen, 1991, p.188). Simply put, the stronger the intention to perform or engage in a behaviour, the more likely it is performed (Azjen, 1991, p.181). Azjen (1991) explains that the relative importance of attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behaviour control varies across behaviours and situations (p.188). For example, in some applications, only attitudes may have an impact on intention (Azjen, 1991, p.188). In others, perceived attitudes and behavioural control may account for intentions (Azjen, 1991, p.188). Sometimes all three determinants may have in effect (Azjen, 1991, p.188).

The theory of planned behaviour provides the necessary framework needed to accomplish the defined research goals. It serves to identify teacher beliefs and understand how these beliefs influence teacher behaviours. Moreover, as explained by Azjen (1991), intention, attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control each reveal a unique aspect of the behaviour. In turn, each determinant provides a point of interest to address the supports and barriers to implementing a sexuality curriculum. If it's a barrier to success, tailored efforts could be used to change this and empower teachers.

Reflective vs. Reflexive Theory & Practice

For the aforementioned components of the theory of planned behaviour to be meaningfully explored, they must be fueled by reflective and reflexive action. Given that educational policy decisions, like those concerning curricular objectives, standards, and changes are often made without the collaborative input of teachers and severely circumscribed, reflective and reflexive practices provide a means of empowerment for teachers in this restrictive environment (Coia & Taylor, 2017, p.60).

Reflection and reflexivity are essential for responsible and ethical practice (Bolton, 2010, p.5). They are the vehicle that enables educators to engage in meaningful thought "about what the new curriculum entails, how it is different or similar from the current practices, and specific areas needed to bridge pedagogical and content knowledge gaps" (Tichnor-Wagner, 2019, p.23). Consequently, successful implementation of SBSE is likely an outcome of teachers' critical reflective and reflexive practice.

Here, critical reflection refers to "the thoughtful analysis of experience and consideration of multiple perspectives leading to improved action" (Glasswell & Ryan, 2017, p.5). It also

includes an “exploration of personal and social values” (Glasswell & Ryan, 2017, p.5). What makes it ‘critical’, Fook (2015) states, is its ability to be transformative and “involve and lead to some fundamental change in perspective” (Fook, 2015, p.441). These ideas about the transformative power of reflection are echoed in the early work of John Dewey.

Dewey powerfully conceptualized reflective practice for teachers when he described learning as a meaning-making process, in which experience is reconstructed (Jones & Ryan,2017, p.207). He argued that the thread by which one experience is connected to another experience or idea is how we develop propositions about them and what makes learning possible (Jones & Ryan, 2017, p.207). Dewey also argued that to be a reflective practitioner requires investigating and engaging with new ideas and other perspectives (Glasswell & Ryan, 2017, p.18).

Reflexivity is potentially more complex than being reflective, given that it involves thinking from within experiences, not just considering events or situations outside of oneself (Bolton, 2010, p.14). Reflexivity is the constant analysis of one’s own theoretical and methodological presumptions. According to Bolton (2010), reflexivity involves “finding strategies to question our own attitudes, thought processes, values, assumptions, prejudices and habitual actions, to strive to understand our complex roles in relation to others” (p.13). Bolton (2010) elaborates on this and describes how reflexive practices allow individuals to become aware of the limits of their knowledge, and the role of behaviour (p.14). The reflexive thinker begins to critically “take circumstances and relationships into consideration rather than merely reacting to them and help review and revise ethical ways of being and relating” (Bolton, 2010, p.14). Therefore, reflexivity is concerned with shared lived experiences and agency. Bolton adds that “through reflexive practice professionals realize dissonance between their own values in

practice and their espoused values, or those of their organization, leading them to make a dynamic change" (Bolton, 2010, p.12). In the realm of education, reflection and reflexivity are not simply techniques or curriculum elements, but rather ongoing constituents of meaningful practice and "a pedagogical approach which should pervade the curriculum" (Bolton, 2010, p.9).

Reflection and reflexivity are collaborative and social processes (Brandenburg & Jones, 2017, p.266). By engaging in collaborative reflection and reflexivity teachers are able to share their ideas, experiences, and question their own assumptions and those of their colleagues (Brandenburg & Jones, 2017, p.267). In doing so, they are able to make meaning from their shared experiences, which has potential to lead to transformative learning. The knowledge generated through these processes has two purposes; to engender change and improvements; and to contribute to the wider knowledge of practice and pedagogy in teacher education (Brandenburg & McDonough, 2017, p.234). Given the social aspect of reflective and reflexive practice, Brandenburg advocates for research methods that embrace this quality (McLean, 2017, p.124). As such, reflective theory and practice also validate my research methodology, which entails a qualitative survey with exploratory questions. The purpose of reflection and reflexivity especially, is to explore and critique the sexuality curriculum and juxtapose personal value frameworks against the values or expectations of the broader curriculum.

Conclusion: Connecting Theory and Topic

According to Sellars (2012), teachers must now "be prepared to engage with the entirety of the holy trinity for teachers: know your content and how you teach it, know your students and how they learn, and know yourself, your values and your capacity for reflection and ethical decision making" (p.462). It is not unreasonable to postulate that understanding oneself is as

important as understanding the curricular objectives, and that there is a definite relationship between those types of knowledge. It is for this reason, the primary theoretical pieces necessary for aligning and justifying my research are curriculum theory and the theory of planned behaviour.

Both frameworks invite, and even require, reflection and reflexive practices to successfully enact each theory. Curriculum theory proposes that reflective and reflexive practices are key in helping teachers adapt to changing policy, curricular standards, and classroom needs. TPB necessitates that individuals engage in reflexive inquiry to uncover the individual's intention to perform a behaviour and the factors influencing such decisions. Therefore, reflective and reflexive practices in curriculum theory and TPB connect with my research topic and consequent methodology, as participants use reflective tools to explore their lived experiences. This research study asks participants to take on the role of teacher, curriculum theorist, and reflexive practitioner!

The theoretical underpinnings of curriculum theory, TPB, and reflective and reflexive theory and practice, work together to allow me to unpack and learn more deeply about the lived experiences of Quebec elementary school teachers' as they enact the newly mandated sexuality curriculum. These theories will allow me to demonstrate how teachers perceive, use, and understand the sexuality curriculum. Additionally, it will allow for the identification of the supports and barriers to successfully implement the curriculum.

The results and conclusion of this study will offer valuable information for contemporary research on curriculum design and school-based sexuality education programs (Haney et al., 1996, p.986). In particular, "the results of this study will support the notion that teacher beliefs are significant contributors to behavioral intention" and that curriculum change and reform

efforts must recognize the importance of such beliefs (Haney et al., 1996, p.986). As a teacher and researcher, I strongly believe that through collaborative and critical reflective and reflexive practices we can engage in shared meaning making and transformative learning, which will enable us to simultaneously change and improve ourselves, our sexuality curriculum and programs, and our profession as a whole (Beattie, 1997, p.112).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter, I will outline the research methodology used throughout the study. I begin the chapter by providing an overview of the research approaches and procedures. This is followed by a discussion of the instruments and the process of data collection. Next, I review the sampling criteria and recruitment procedures. Then I explain the data analysis methods and I highlight the limitations and strengths of the methodology. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a brief overview and summary of the methodological decisions I made and the rationale for these decisions given the unique context, purpose, and questions of my study. Overall, this project is grounded in qualitative research that uses an exploratory survey to collect data on the subjective lived experiences of teachers.

Research Approaches & Procedures

This research study was guided by a qualitative methodological framework. This consisted of a review of the relevant literature, as well as an online survey with a small sample of elementary school teachers teaching in the province of Quebec. The primary rationale for selecting a qualitative approach to explore the topic of school-based sexuality education is the nature of my defined research problem. As Marshall (1996) contends, the choice between quantitative and qualitative research methods is contingent on the research problem and question, and not on the preference of the researcher (p.522). According to Jackson et al. (2007), the main intent of qualitative research is to better understand “human beings richly textured experiences and reflections about those experiences" (p.22). Qualitative studies are concerned with shedding light on or understanding complex psychosocial issues and, therefore, are most useful for

answering humanistic ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions (Marshall, 1996, p.522). In this sense, qualitative researchers rely on the participants to offer in-depth responses about their lived experiences (Jackson et al., 2007, p.23). On the other hand, the aim of most quantitative research is to test pre-determined hypotheses and produce generalizable data and results (Marshall, 1996, p.522). Such studies are useful for answering ‘what’ questions since they rely on “a set of finite questions to elicit categorized, forced-choice responses with little room for open-ended replies to questions" (Marshall, 1996, p.522; Jackson et al., 2007, p.23). Although quantifiable numbers are impressive, they often “conceal far more than they reveal" (Suter, 2012, p.344). By design, the qualitative researcher will get much more information about a topic or phenomenon (Jackson et al., 2007, p.23). It is for this reason that a qualitative approach is also called “thick descriptive” given the richness and detail of the discussions it allows to take place (Jackson et al., 2007, p.23).

According to Hammersley (2013), qualitative research can be defined as “a form of social inquiry that tends to adopt flexible, data-driven research design, to use relatively unstructured data, to emphasize the essential role of subjectivity in the research design, to study a small number of naturally occurring cases in detail” (p.12). The main aim is to understand and explain the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours of individuals. Therefore, it is ideally suited for the complexity of my research study. A qualitative approach has the ability to capture the teacher-participants’ subjective experiences and meaning-making processes surrounding the Quebec sexuality curriculum. It produces descriptive data on how or why teachers may implement the curriculum differently and what barriers or supports exist and how they may impact curriculum implementation.

This research study allowed participants to describe their experiences and explain their thoughts, attitudes, and perceptions of teaching the sexuality curriculum. As such, qualitative research is valuable because it provides individuals with an opportunity to share their voice. Overall, the research problem and questions in this study were best investigated using a qualitative survey.

Data Collection

Qualitative research favours techniques and methods in which data is collected in the form of interviews, observations, case studies, exploratory surveys, and documents (Suter, 2012, p.347). Similar to the research approach, the method(s) of data collection relies on the purpose of the study and which technique will produce the most useful and meaningful results in order to respond to the proposed research questions (Marshall, 1996, p.522).

Considering that qualitative research is guided by the philosophical assumptions of qualitative inquiry, Suter (2012) contends that "to understand a complex phenomenon, you must consider the multiple 'realities' experienced by the participants themselves" (p.344). He refers to this as the "insider perspectives" (Suter, 2012, p.344). As I sought to understand how Quebec elementary school teachers use, understand, and experience the newly mandated sexuality curriculum, I thought that surveying a small sample of these teachers would produce the most relevant data on the subject. To gain greater insight into the reality of teaching the sexuality curriculum I needed to question the "insiders" themselves!

Surveys

The survey is a familiar methodological tool in social science research (Braun et al., 2020, p.1). A qualitative survey consists of a series of open-ended questions centered on a particular topic that are prepared in advance and "generated in negotiation with the relevant academic and non-academic literature, alongside [the researcher's] thoughts and hunches about what areas might be important to cover" (Rapley, 2004, p.17). The survey is self-administered, and participants respond by typing responses in their own words rather than selecting from pre-determined response options (Braun et al., 2020, p.1). As a result, the survey allows for greater flexibility and responsiveness, which in turn can produce rich and complex accounts of participants' subjective experiences, narratives, practices, perspectives, and discourses (Braun et al., 2020, p.1).

A survey is often utilized in mixed-method approaches to gather variable amounts of qualitative data. However, *fully* qualitative surveys are a relatively novel and underutilised method as Braun et al., (2020) suggest: the "underutilisation and limited methodological discussion perhaps reflect the dominance of interviews in qualitative research, and (misplaced) assumptions about qualitative survey data lacking depth" (p.1). In a recent study, Braun et al., (2020) challenge those preconceptions and demonstrate that fully qualitative surveys "*are* compatible with research embedded in broadly qualitative research values or paradigms and that qualitative survey datasets *can* provide richness and depth, when viewed in their entirety, even if individual responses might themselves be brief" (p.2).

The use of qualitative surveys, as a primary method, offers several advantages for researchers and participants alike, especially given the online delivery options (Braun et al., 2020, p.3). First, a qualitative survey offers a "wide-angle lens" on the topic of interest, which

has the potential to capture a diversity of perspectives and experiences (Braun et al., 2020, p.3). As Braun et al., (2020) point out, "this diversity is about hearing a range of voices and sense-making, something especially useful when researching an un- or under- explored area" or when the population of interest in large, diverse, or not well known (p.3). Online qualitative surveys facilitate access to these populations and diverse responses. Braun et al., (2020) also share that in their experience using surveys the data collected tends to be more densely packed with relevant information, focused and 'on target' than interview data (p.4).

Second, online qualitative surveys encourage disclosure and participation for sensitive topics (Braun et al., 2020, p.4). As we know, the data collection methods used in a study shape who is willing to participate. Online qualitative surveys have the potential to attract and "give voice" to individuals who might abstain from face-to-face research on certain topics (Braun et al., 2020, p.4). As such, online qualitative surveys are ideally suited to sensitive research projects, such as those investigating sex related topics, because "they offer a high level of *felt* anonymity" (Braun et al., 2020, p.4). As Braun et al., (2020) explain, although online surveys may not be completely anonymous in practice, they can *feel* completely anonymous from the participant's perspective since the researcher cannot see them and does not know their name (p.5). As a result, it can facilitate participation and disclosure (Braun et al., 2020, p.5). Braun et al., (2020) also note how surveys do not require the same skill and experience from researchers as interviews making it suitable for inexperienced, novice, or student researchers. (Braun et al., 2020, p.5)

Finally, online qualitative surveys offer some practical advantages for participants. For instance, qualitative surveys "afford participants *control* over key aspects of their research participation" (Braun et al., 2020, p.6). In these studies, individuals do not need to travel to meet

a researcher or host them at home (Braun et al., 2020, p.6). Similarly, participants have the freedom and flexibility to choose how long they spend with the survey (Braun et al., 2020, p.6). In most online formats, participants can complete the survey all at once or over several occasions, thereby having the time and space to reflect on their responses. Furthermore, participants have the ability to decide when, where, and how they complete the survey (Braun et al., 2020, p.6). In one study, they found participants completed online surveys late at night or early in the morning—both of which are unlikely times for an interview (Braun et al., 2020, p.6). The flexibility offered by online qualitative surveys may be especially valuable for participants with physical or mental health challenges, or commitments such as caregiving, school, or work obligations (Braun et al., 2020, p.6). In this sense, online qualitative surveys are participant-centered research practices.

Recently, the range of possibilities and benefits of a uniquely qualitive survey has been realized by some significant studies. As noted by Braun et al., (2020) the existing literature has been primarily concentrated in appearance, sexuality, and health (p.2). For example, qualitative surveys have been used by used by researchers to study and explore the "experiences of [individuals] living with and seeking support for alopecia (Davey et al., 2019); women's experiences of coping with endometriosis (Grogan et al., 2018); women's body identities after mastectomy (Grogan & Mechan, 2017); LGB people's experiences of (non-HIV) chronic illnesses (Jowett & Peel, 2009); lesbian and bisexual women's experiences of pregnancy loss (Peel, 2010); BDSM practitioners' perceptions of media representation of BDSM (Barrett, 2007); young adult's experiences of orgasm (Opperman et al., 2014); views on pubic hair (Braun et al., 2013); body hair practices (Terry & Braun, 2013, 2016; Terry et al, 2018; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004); gender/sexuality and clothing practices (Clarke & Smith 2015; Clarke &

Spence, 2013; Frith & Gleeson 2004, 2008); and heterosexuals' perceptions of bisexual, lesbian, and gay appearance (Hayfield, 2013)" (Braun et al., 2020, p.2).

For the purpose of this research study, I used a *fully* qualitative, anonymous online survey. A qualitative survey seemed most appropriate given that (a) sexuality research is arguably a sensitive topic, (b) the research sought to explore a wide range of perspectives and experiences and finally (c) the population sample of teachers could be dispersed across the province of Quebec. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed many facets of our daily lives, and, understandably, influenced the context for research and data collection. The global crisis has led to a sharp increase in remote methodologies of data collection, such as surveys delivered online through specialized software. It is for these reasons I used a survey to collect the thoughts of elementary school teachers in Quebec on SBSE.

Data was collected through an anonymous online survey and contained two types of open-ended questions: demographic and topic based. Although the questions I developed for this study are broad and insightful, they likely did not consider all the perspectives on the topic. As a result, the last question asked participants to share any final thoughts or questions in order to elicit any other valuable information.

Surveys as the instrument of data collection allow participants to offer special and subjective insight into their lived experiences (Rapley, 2004, p.15). Within the framework, qualitative survey data captures what is important to participants and enables the researcher to gather contrasting and complementary discussions on the same topic or issue (Rapley, 2004, p.18). In fact, the primary advantage of conducting surveys is the ability to generate large amounts of data in a limited amount of time (Jackson et al., 2007, p.25; Rabiee, 2004, p.656). A

qualitative survey offers a useful vehicle for involving teachers in curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation.

Participants

Sampling Procedures

The nature of this study required a small and selective sample (n=8) to gain in-depth insight into elementary school teachers' experiences teaching the sexuality curriculum. It "seeks to gain a picture of a larger group by examining a smaller group" (Morehouse, 2012, p.74). As this is a qualitative study, sampling methods attuned to this type of research were used, notably convenience and purposive sampling.

Convenience sampling involves selecting the most accessible subjects to participate in the study (Marshall, 1996, p.523). As a graduate student within McGill University's department of Integrated Studies in Education, and supply teacher at various schools in the province, I had a well-established network of teachers and some of the participants in this study came from these contacts and connections. As the name suggests, purposive sampling sees the researcher 'purposely' select participants with potential to provide the most productive, insightful or rich information to answer the research questions (Marshall, 1996, p.523; Suter, 2012, p.345). According to Horsburgh (2002) sampling decisions in qualitative research should be purposive "in that selection of participants is made on the basis of their ability to provide relevant data on the area under investigation" (p.311). Qualitative researchers recognize that some participants are 'richer' in knowledge and experience than others and selecting "these people are more likely to provide insight and understanding for the researcher" (Marshall, 1996, p.523).

Sampling Criteria

In order to explore my research questions, it was necessary to conduct purposive sampling. To do this, I ensured all participants, including those from my teacher network, fit prescribed sampling criteria. The following criteria were used to determine and select teacher participants:

- The participant must be an elementary teacher in the province of Quebec.
- The teacher-participant must have taught the Quebec sexuality curriculum at the elementary school level during at least one of the following academic years: 2018-2019; 2019-2020; 2020-now.

These criteria helped to identify 'information-rich' participants. Moreover, attempts were made to invite teachers from each grade or cycle. I sought teacher participants who have taught at differing school boards or schools in an attempt to expand the scope and representativeness of the data, and ultimately maximize the sampling variation. However, to ease concerns of re-identification specific details such as the schoolboard or school name were not collected in the study. Instead, general comments regarding the school environment (i.e., urban or rural) and teacher demographics (i.e., gender, grade, etc.) are stated. Similarly, to maintain confidentiality each participant has been assigned a pseudonym.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research tends to generate large amounts of data, which can overwhelm novice as well as experienced researchers (p.657). To overcome this, Krueger & Casey suggest that the purpose of the research should drive the analysis process (Rabiee, 2004, p.675). They explain that "analysis begins by going back to the intention of the study and survival required a

clear fix on the purpose of the study" (Krueger & Casey, 2000 as cited in Rabiee, 2004, p.657). Analysis is an ongoing process in which you move back and forth as needed "between the entire data set, the coded extracts of data you are analyzing, and the analysis of the data you are producing" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.15). Although data analysis does not take place in a linear form, it does help having a clear procedure, so the process is well documented and understood (Rabiee, 2004, p.657).

Thematic Analysis

This research study used thematic analysis to analyze the data. Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative analytic method (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.2). According to Braun & Clark (2006) it is a useful and flexible research tool that can provide complex, rich, and detailed accounts of the data (p. 5). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.6). Good thematic analysis does more than simply summarize the data; it interprets and makes sense of it in relation to the research purpose and questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.3).

In this study, the data analysis process modeled Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide to thematic analysis. This is arguably one of the most influential approaches in the social sciences because it offers a clear functioning framework for doing thematic analysis. The six phases are concisely outlined below:

Phase 1: Familiarise yourself with the data

- The survey responses are read thoroughly.

Phase 2: Generate initial codes

- The researcher works systematically through the entire data set and gives full and equal attention to each data item.
- An initial list of ideas about what is in the data and what is interesting about them is generated.
- Initial codes are produced from the data that appeared most interesting to the researcher.

Phase 3: Search for themes

- Once the data has been initially coded and collated, themes are found within the categories.
- The researcher considers how different codes may combine to form an overarching theme.

Phase 4: Review themes

- The validity of each individual theme and how it adds meaning to the larger thematic map is considered.

Phase 5: Define and name themes

- For each theme a detailed analysis is written. Any sub themes are identified.

Phase 6: Produce report

- The themes among the survey are synthesized and discussed within a compelling analytic narrative that relates to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.16-24).

Analysis is exciting because "you discover themes and concepts embedded throughout your [data]" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995 as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.7). However, it is important to recognize that analysis does not occur in an epistemological vacuum (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.12). There is an interplay between the researcher and the data (Rabiee, 2004, p.657). The

researcher always plays a *subjective* and *active* role in "identifying patterns/themes, selecting which are of interest, and reporting them to the readers" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.7). In order to minimize the potential bias, Krueger & Casey explain that analysis should be systematic, sequential, verifiable, and continuous (Krueger & Casey, 2000 as cited in Rabiee, 2004, p.657).

Methodological Limitations & Strengths

There are some limitations and strengths to qualitative research methods. For instance, in qualitative research, "the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis" (Merriam, 2009, p.15). Therefore, there is no illusion of objectivity in these types of studies. As a student, researcher, and educator I recognize my subjective position within the research limits the claims being made as I am personally invested in the research topic. However, if researchers actively acknowledge their role and impact on the research and interpretation of data and monitor the way their subjectivities may influence the research process, it can actually lead to enhanced safeguards for trustworthiness and accountability—important characteristics for assessing the quality of qualitative data (Jackson et al., 2007, p.23; Rabiee, 2004, p.657).

The largest limitation of this study was the size and scope of the population. The findings cannot be generalized since it relied on a limited number of participants' personal accounts of their experiences. However, as previously stated, generalizable statistics was not the goal of this research. This research intended to provide in-depth insight into the lived experiences of a small group of Quebec teachers.

Despite the limitations, qualitative research methods have many strengths. Qualitative research provides rich detail and understanding of complex topics. For example, this research

shows emerging patterns of teachers experience teaching sexuality education. Qualitative research gives value to different voices, perspectives and knowledge.

Since I surveyed only a small number of teachers, this study does not profess to represent all teachers' experiences. Rather it provided a thoughtful account of the participants' experiences and provided them an opportunity to have their voices be heard. Qualitative research studies, such as this one, provide meaningful recommendations and avenues for further inquiry and change.

Conclusion

Overall, this research project takes on a qualitative approach in which exploratory surveys were used to collect rich data from a few elementary school teachers in Quebec about their experiences teaching the recently mandated sexuality curriculum. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Although the data cannot be applied to a larger scale, it offers interesting insight on the topic at a micro-level. In the following chapter, I report on the specific findings of the research.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

Introduction

The following chapter will highlight and explore the prominent themes that emerged from an analysis of the data collected through a qualitative survey with elementary school teachers in Quebec. The findings have been summarized and presented as three distinct themes. The themes developed based on how best they addressed the following research questions:

- How are elementary school teachers using, understanding, and experiencing the sexuality education curriculum in Quebec elementary schools?
- What are teachers' perspectives and willingness in teaching the content of the sexuality education curriculum? What factors may influence teachers' willingness to teach sexuality education?
- What are the best practices that teachers have learned or reportedly employed during their experience teaching the sexuality education curriculum?
- What supports are available to assist teachers in implementing the new sexuality education curriculum? What limitations or difficulties have teachers encountered while implementing the sexuality education curriculum?

Emergent Themes from Inquiry

Through the data analysis, the following themes emerged to highlight teachers' experiences implementing the newly mandated sexuality curriculum in Quebec:

1. Teachers' Perspectives on the Delivery of Sexuality Education
2. Supports and Strategies for Implementation
3. Limitations and Barriers to Implementation

Although the findings are presented as distinct themes, it is important to note that they interact and are bound to one another within the discourse. The main idea that seems to be embodied in all the themes is the complexity around the provision of school-based sexuality education.

Given that Connelly & Clandinin (1990) articulate the importance of situating qualitative research, I will begin this chapter by providing a brief overview of the sample. Next, I will discuss in detail each of the aforementioned themes. Under each theme, teachers' views are conveyed using excerpts from their survey responses.

Information about the Sample

A total of eight teachers participated in the exploratory survey. To maintain confidentiality protocol, each participant has been assigned a pseudonym. The participating teachers are employed at various English elementary school schools across the province of Quebec. In addition, efforts were made to include teachers from different grades in an attempt to expand the scope and representativeness of the data. As a result, teachers from Kindergarten and all three elementary cycles were represented fairly evenly. The sample consists of the following participant profiles:

Audrey, a Kindergarten teacher

Olivia, a Grade 1 (Cycle 1, Year 1) teacher

Alice, a Grade 1 (Cycle 1, Year 1) teacher

Emily, a Grade 2 (Cycle 1, Year 2) teacher

Charlie, a Grade ¾ (Cycle 2, Year 1 & 2) teacher

Taylor, a Grade ¾ (Cycle 2, Year 1 & 2) teacher

Caroline, a Grade 5 (Cycle 3, Year 1) teacher

William, a Grade 6 (Cycle 3, Year 2) teacher

All the participants have over 6 years of teaching experience, with most reporting over 10 years in the field. However, the majority of the teachers reported that 2018 (i.e., when the curriculum was mandated) was the first time they explicitly taught sexuality education.

Teachers Perspectives on Sexuality Education

This theme is consistent with the notion that individuals are not 'tabula rasa' or blank slates. According to Tushabomwe (2014), that means teachers "do not enter learning environments as empty vessels. Rather, they bring with them who they are and what has moulded them over the years" (p.46). Consequently, when teachers enter sexuality discourses, they likely have established beliefs and opinions that have been solidified and informed by their knowledge, experiences, relationships, media consumption, etc. Similarly, sexuality itself does not appear in a vacuum. As Tushabomwe (2014) explains sexuality "is in constant interaction with the norms and beliefs a society holds, which may not necessarily be in agreement with the teachers' stances" (p.51). Therefore, these implicit beliefs may influence how teachers perceive educational phenomena, such as the sexuality education curriculum. Navigating the ministerial curriculum guidelines with teachers' personal beliefs can be a difficult task especially when there is a gap or disconnect between the two components.

The following section will discuss elementary school teachers' perspectives on sexuality education, especially regarding *whose* responsibility it is to teach it and at *what* age.

Delivery of Sexuality Education

The participants in this study discussed parents' involvement in the delivery of sexuality education. They noted that sexuality education should begin first and foremost at home; therefore, the responsibility rests with the parents to teach these subjects. However, there is a growing trend in which parents are less involved in their child(rens)' education. As a consequence, the pressure is seemingly placed on teachers to fill in these learning gaps, and several respondents have observed this trend with the sexuality curriculum.

> First, I find it is up to parents to teach their children certain aspects of life. The fact they are not doing so is worrisome - or the fact the government feels it is not well done by parents is also worrisome. What kind of society will we have if parents cannot educate their own children for the basics (respect others, self-respect, etc.)? … I was not surprised [to find out we had to teach sexuality education] because nowadays we are responsible for teaching much more than just regular school subjects like Math, French, Gym, Music…. We also need to teach manners, respect and basically raise these youngsters. So, adding the sexuality course is just another addition to all of this (Taylor).

> I would like to see the parents having to deal with this issue. I understand that it was given to the schools to do because many did not get this education at home, but once again, I feel that the pressure and responsibility are put on teachers. Once again, we are taking parental responsibilities away from them and asking teachers to do it (Emily).

It is evident from the teachers' narratives that they perceive a lack of parental involvement. They understand that sexuality education fails to exist in many households, and it is for these reasons they are tasked with teaching it. These answers also confirm that teachers are not necessarily

excited about their newly assigned role, which will be discussed in greater detail in the final section.

Considering parents are the primary custodians of their children, several respondents shared their trepidation in delivering sexuality education. Many were fearful that teaching the curriculum could be perceived as overstepping a boundary between teacher-student, and teacher-parent relationships. For example, Taylor explains that "talking about your body and who you are as an individual, should be done with people you are close to. Not a teacher. Teachers now need to be 'close' to their students - I find there is a line to draw at some point".

When asked how comfortable they felt answering students' questions about sexuality topics, Emily shared that she is often afraid that an angry parent might come back with something she said in class. As a result, she tries to answer just the basics and not go into too much detail. When unsure how to respond she may say something like "ask your parents". This comment is significant as it highlights teachers' boundaries and their attempt to include parents in these discussions by providing a point of entry for these conversations to extend outside of the classroom walls.

One of the survey questions asked respondents if they could change anything about the new sexuality curriculum, what it would be. Alice blatantly stated that it should involve the parents more. Comprehensive sexuality education is like a triangle-it requires the support and cooperation of each three sides: the teacher/school, the parent and the student. In light of the survey responses, many elementary school teachers feel the weight of providing sexuality education rests, unfairly, on only their shoulders.

A few participants also shared their perspectives on the age at which SBSE should be delivered. In their opinion, the Quebec sexuality curriculum starts too early and is too advanced.

As Taylor explains, “I need to teach in Cycle II what the nurse used to come and do in Grade 5 and 6”. Emily, a grade two teacher, also shared that “I don’t think elementary school teachers in cycle one and two should be responsible for teaching this”. These responses seem to be in line with discourses of childhood innocence and the preference for sexuality education to be introduced during the later elementary years (i.e., periods associated with puberty or hormonal changes).

In Quebec, the sexuality curriculum prescribes suitable content to be explored at each grade level starting in kindergarten to grade eleven. Therefore, the perception of age-appropriate material can be difficult for teachers to navigate. On one hand, they must respect what the curriculum deems as “age-appropriate”. On the other hand, they likely have their own perspectives regarding when it is reasonable to teach these topics.

For example, Emily confirmed that as a parent she did not talk about sex education with her children at this early age. However, now as a teacher, she is required to introduce sexual health topics to her second-grade students. She noted that the content of the curriculum “goes into detail... about sexuality, making babies and intimate body parts” and that when teaching this to her students it was hard for the children in the group to stay focused and serious during these discussions. She added that “some students are very uncomfortable and shy, some block out and some start fooling around and acting out”, all of which suggests that perhaps second graders are too young for these discussions. In turn, teachers, like Emily, are tasked with finding a balance between loyalty to the curriculum and the needs of their students, while also accounting for their personal biases.

Although many participants in this study perceive sexuality education as the parents’ responsibility and question the age at which the curriculum is delivered, their responses also

illustrate that they are committed to their profession and meeting the curricular expectations regardless. As Taylor simply puts it, “I am a teacher so if I do need to teach it I will”.

Supports and Strategies for Implementation

Sexuality education is a complex system. Therefore, implementing the newly mandated curriculum in ways that lead to profound changes in teaching and learning involves an intricate and multifaceted mixture of ingredients (Tichnor-Wagner, 2019, p.22). To illustrate, the overall quality of sexuality education rests on the quality of the teachers, and the quality of teachers depends on the systems in place to support them (Tichnor-Wagner, 2019, p.23). This study examined teacher-identified conditions for successful curricular implementation. The teachers surveyed spoke of two facilitating factors that supported the implementation of the new sexuality curriculum: teaching through literature and collaborative team cultures.

Teaching Through Literature

When asked to describe the best practices or strategies for teaching sexuality education, several respondents commented on the use of books. Almost every teacher surveyed described feeling overwhelmed and apprehensive when they were first assigned the sexuality curriculum. Unsure where to start, these teachers sought out additional resources, particularly books, to support their teaching.

> I had to turn around and go buy books to help me with these subjects. I tried to teach through books [and] this helped a lot! (Emily)

> I have looked at the subjects that I have to teach, found storybooks for the children and other online materials I may use (Alice).
>
> [In] the homeroom [we cover] whatever is not covered in the previous mentioned [subjects] and always through excellent literature (Olivia).

The participants also discussed the format of their lesson plans. Many revealed that they used storybooks as a hook or introduction to the topic they are exploring. This was usually accompanied by a class discussion or question period.

> We use a suggested text in literature to present the lesson concept to be taught to the class and then following through with a discussion or drawing depending on the given lesson (Olivia).
>
> I used a book to introduce the subject (e.g., pregnancy and birth). I read the book and then we had a discussion and I answered questions (Emily).
>
> Storybooks for children and then discussions (Alice).

One participant also described how books can be used to respond to 'teachable moments' or other events that arise in and outside the classroom. For example, Taylor described how "Pink Shirt Day opens up discussions on gender stereotypes". In turn, teachers may use these days to guide their literature selection and, in this case, explore the connection between gender stereotypes, identity, and bullying (e.g., homophobia).

Alice, a grade one teacher, relies on storybooks to support the curriculum because her students "need the visual and the creativity to understand the topics".

When asked what advice they would give new teachers about teaching sexuality education, a few respondents suggested using books or videos to get started. They noted that

lessons that incorporated these strategies were the most well-received by their students- “the children were responsive and grasped the concept being taught” (Olivia).

These answers confirm that teachers find books to be one of the most supportive pedagogical tools at their disposal.

Collaborative Team Culture

The teachers surveyed acknowledged that a strong, collaborative team culture can also support curricular implementation at the classroom level. Every participant revealed that they discussed the sexuality curriculum with other teachers, usually their cycle team.

During these conversations, teachers would contemplate the learning objectives and share lesson plans and teaching materials. Participants also noted that during these meetings they would share their experiences teaching the curriculum with their colleagues. By participating in these collaborative and in-depth discussions teachers were able to develop a better understanding of the curriculum and explore new pedagogical approaches.

Furthermore, many respondents praised the support they received from their school leaders (i.e., principals, administrators, etc.). School leaders can facilitate and promote a collaborative culture and, in turn, support curriculum implementation in numerous ways. They can “provide common planning time for staff, guide robust conversations around the intricacies of implementing the curriculum”, create a congruent message or shared vision that supports teachers, students, and the curriculum, and, lastly, provide access to materials (Tichnor-Wagner, 2019, p.11-12).

Emily recounted that they were first asked to teach sexuality education in a staff meeting. She noted that “there were questions and concerns for sure from teachers. Being mandatory,

there wasn't much of a discussion to have. However, our principal was very understanding and did not put any pressure on us. We were given the opportunity and funds to buy books to help us with the teaching of this". Similar experiences were shared by other respondents. They described feeling full support from their administrator(s) and colleagues, which was illustrated in: the principal's respect for each teacher's comfort level; the fair distribution of tasks and data collection; scheduled team meetings; and access to additional resources. It appears that strong school leadership support is an important factor that can empower teachers and facilitate curriculum implementation.

Limitations & Barriers to Implementation

Considering teachers are the ones responsible for implementing the new sexuality curriculum, the survey asked respondents to describe the biggest challenge(s) they have encountered. The participants reported three major barriers that impacted how effectively they have been able to implement the new curriculum. This includes a lack of resources and abstruse curricular documents; time constraints; and inadequate training or professional development. These perceived barriers are a reflection of their individual attitudes, beliefs, experiences, and skills. In light of the data analysis, I also suggest teachers' attitudes toward sexuality education and comfort teaching these topics have the potential to negatively impact curricular implementation. Each of these barriers will be discussed in detail below.

Lack of Resources & Vague Curricular Documents

The failure to provide clear curricular documentation and guidance can hinder implementation efforts. The participants in this study used the survey platform to criticize the

sexuality curriculum in Quebec. As Olivia describes, teachers were only "given a guidebook with some explanation". Caroline extends on this noting, they "were left with no materials, just a broad spectrum of what to teach, sort of". More than half of the participants surveyed described the Quebec sexuality curriculum as vague. Abstruse documents do not provide clarity on what the curriculum should look like in the classroom and can impede the actualization of the intended curriculum. Without clear policy and curricular documents to guide teachers, they are left to rely on their own interpretations. Caroline states that since "MELS [Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport] has not given clear lesson plans or materials...we [teachers] wing it".

The teachers surveyed also cited the lack of resources as an obstacle. Besides the vague curriculum and books they were allowed to purchase, no other supports were made available. Taylor mentioned on many accounts that teachers should be given specific materials to teach with.

> I would like for the province of Quebec to have specific workbooks or binders to photocopy for all students of all grade levels (English or French school boards) that we can use to teach this course material (Taylor).

Taylor cited that having lesson plans already made up would make teachers feel better about teaching these topics. The participants' voices affirm that most of them do not feel adequately supported to teach sexuality education given the vague curricular documents and lack of learning materials. This may lead to insufficient and inconsistent coverage of the curriculum.

Time Constraints

A lack of time was one of the most frequently reported barriers to implementation. Specifically, the teachers surveyed noted a lack of time in the schedule to execute the new

sexuality curriculum. William explains this, highlighting the biggest challenge in teaching sexuality education is “taking time to include it in our already very busy days. [There is] so much pressure to have our students excel in reading and writing, I don’t feel like there’s time.” Emily adds to this saying, “the curriculum is already full without adding this to it. Now we have to find time for it at specific times of year”.

When asked how much time they have been able to allocate to teaching the sexuality curriculum the participants responded:

“Not much, a few hours a year” (Caroline).

“10 hours a year” (William).

“As much as I can with the rest of the curriculum that we need to teach” (Alice).

These answers highlight how full the curriculum is and what little time and space there is for additional content. As a result, sexuality education seems to be squeezed into whatever openings teachers can find. The responses also suggest the primacy of traditional subject areas such as English Language Arts. Society and educational institutions value certain subjects over others, and that can also thwart curriculum efforts (Tichnor-Wagner, 2019, p.16).

Olivia and Emily mentioned another constraint-the lack of time to plan and prepare for curricular implementation. They noted that often several teachers are involved with teaching the same group of students. Therefore, the content must be divided between the ethics, physical education, and homeroom teachers. This requires meeting and planning to decide who teaches it or what subjects they will each cover, and there simply is not time for that in the current schedule.

Furthermore, these obstacles were only exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. School closures and online learning have overburdened and exhausted teachers as they attempt to bring

their students up to speed while also enforcing enhanced sanitary measures. As a result, many participants revealed that the sexuality curriculum has been neglected. Alice shared, “I think it is a bit of a forgotten subject at the moment with COVID because we just don’t have time to get everything done...it has been very difficult to find the appropriate amount of time”. Emily admits that during the 2019-2020 year they did not teach it at all. William adds that “in the COVID reality, I am thankful to not have a bunch of pressure from administration to go crazy with this stuff”.

It is clear from these responses that Quebec elementary schoolteachers are attempting to juggle numerous responsibilities and assigned roles to ensure a positive and safe learning environment, even if it means the expectations of the sexuality curriculum are not synchronous with classroom realities at the moment. Alice says, “We are doing the best we can with the material and time we have!”

Inadequate Education, Training & Professional Development

The survey assessed participants’ preparedness to teach sexuality education. Participants cited a lack of adequate education, training, and professional development opportunities as a barrier to implementation. Five of the teachers surveyed expressed that they were not provided with any in-service training and did not recall pre-service training related to the delivery of sexuality education. As Bryce (2014) notes, “the lack of pre-service training may be excused by the timeframe during which the participants attended their teacher education programs” (p.39). However, the lack of in-service training reflects a timely critique of the Quebec ministry of education and how inadequately teachers were prepared to play the envisioned role of sexuality educator.

The remaining participants reported that they received only 1-2 hours of training from their school board consultant. Given the sensitive nature of sexual health topics and the number of hours of instruction required to garner the skills to teach any of the core subjects (e.g., English Language Arts, Math, Science, etc.), it seems reasonable to question if one to two hours of professional development is sufficient. To support equitable and effective classroom implementation, teacher training needs to be comprehensive, accessible to all educators, and include multiple 'check-ins' throughout the school year.

Not surprisingly, many participants described feeling incompetent and unknowledgeable about sexuality education. They described feeling knowledgeable and comfortable enough to support themselves and their families; however, these feelings were not reflected in their role as an educator. As a teacher, many participants felt they were missing valuable knowledge about sexuality education.

The lack of pre-service and in-service training in sexuality education has led to a knowledge gap and left teachers to rely on their colleagues and personal experiences to actualize the curriculum.

Teachers' Discomfort & Attitude Toward Teaching SBSE

Teachers' comfort teaching sexuality topics and their attitude toward SBSE may influence their willingness to implement the curriculum. Therefore, discomfort and negative attitudes can impede the actualization of the sexuality curriculum. Results show an overwhelming majority of the teachers surveyed expressed discomfort in teaching sexuality education.

William, an adept sixth-grade teacher, shared that he was uncomfortable when he was first informed about the content of the mandated curriculum. William states that "as a male

teacher I must always be extra careful when discussing sexuality. I simply don't discuss anything that makes me uncomfortable". His response suggests a possible relationship between teachers' gender and their comfort teaching the sexuality curriculum.

The term "uncomfortable" was explicitly used by multiple participants on six unique occasions. In addition, even when participants did not outwardly state they were uncomfortable, the feeling could be deduced from their narrative. For example, when asked how comfortable they felt answering students' questions about sexuality topics, one participant expressed, "I would rather teach Math". This response implies that the individual would rather avoid students' sexuality-related questions than address them, which alludes to some teacher discomfort.

The teachers surveyed were also asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (1-being not comfortable/willing and 5 being very comfortable/willing) how comfortable or willing they are to teach the following broad curricular themes provided by the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement Supérieur:

Comprehensive View of Sexuality.

Sexual Growth & Body Image.

Identity, Gender Stereotypes and Roles, and Social Norms.

Emotional & Romantic Life.

Sexual Assault.

Pregnancy & Birth.

The data shows that the participants were least comfortable teaching Sexual Growth & Body Image, and Sexual Assault. Conversely, participants were most comfortable teaching a Comprehensive View of Sexuality, and Identity, Gender Stereotypes and Roles, and Social

Norms. It can be concluded that the majority of the participants are not comfortable or confident teaching all the facets of the curriculum.

Only one participant, Olivia, reported that she was very comfortable and willing to teach all six themes. This may be explained by the fact she perceives sexuality education as valuable. When asked to explain the importance they assign to comprehensive sexuality education she shared the following response:

> Given that topics such as awareness of inclusiveness and guidelines for 'right touch and wrong touch' I think that it is very important even if it only speaks to one child, but it happens to be a child in a situation that he/she was not aware of before and now has the knowledge of how to tell someone and get the help they need (Olivia).

These observations reveal that teachers possess different comfort levels. The analysis also revealed some variation in teachers' attitudes toward teaching the new curriculum. Most participants, with the exception of one or two, seem to hold a negative view of teaching sexuality education. The notion that teachers do not want to teach the curriculum was shared on several accounts. Furthermore, arguably the sharpest objection was the following response: "The general consensus on teaching this is: BS".

Participants were explicitly asked to describe or rate their willingness to teach the sexuality education curriculum. The following responses were reported:

> Very reluctant (William).
>
> Hesitant because they are intense subjects at times and also sensitive for young children who may not be aware of them at all (Alice).
>
> None very willing (Caroline).
>
> Positive (Audrey).

I do it because I am asked to do it (Emily).

These narratives suggest that teachers are not fully willing to enact the sexuality curriculum. It is also apparent in this study, that teacher variables such as teacher discomfort and unwilling attitudes can hinder curricular implementation. Although they may be mediated by some of the aforementioned themes such as vague curricular documents and a lack of education or training, these are still unique barriers to curricular implementation and necessitate research attention.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the findings from a qualitative survey conducted with eight elementary school teachers in Quebec concerning their experiences teaching SBSE. The experiences and perspectives shared by Audrey, Olivia, Alice, Emily, Charlie, Taylor, Caroline and William are the first step to better understanding how teachers are using, understanding, and experiencing the recently mandated sexuality education curriculum. From the analysis of the surveys three main themes emerged: teachers' perspectives on the delivery of sexuality education (i.e., by who and at what age); effective supports and strategies for implementation; and the barriers or limitations to successful implementation. It is evident that the provision of sexuality education in Quebec elementary schools is a multifaceted discussion and teachers' perspectives reveal various layers of nuances. Although I presented rich excerpts from each participant's narrative, I am aware that in qualitative studies, such as this one, "researchers step in and out of school settings coming away with stories that are always incomplete and partial" (Clandin, 2007, p.375). Therefore, in the next chapter, I will discuss these findings and themes in relation to the existing literature, provide recommendations for key stakeholders, and suggest avenues for further research.

Chapter 5: Discussion & Conclusion

In this final chapter, I will discuss the key findings from the study and their significance to understanding school-based sexuality education in Quebec. More specifically, I will discuss how the themes and interpretations introduced in Chapter Four relate to the literature that was examined at the beginning of the thesis. I will also draw on the theoretical frameworks outlined in Chapter Two, namely curriculum theory, the theory of planned behaviour, and reflexive theory and practice, to support how the data gathered from this specific group of participants relate to my research questions and sexuality education discourses at large. From there, I will set out some recommendations for curriculum designers and policymakers, administrators, and teachers. Lastly, I will transition into a review of the limitations of the study and suggest potential areas for future research before concluding the chapter.

Discussion of Results

Studies of school-based sexuality education tend to focus on program effectiveness and the views of parents, students, and, occasionally, secondary teachers (Eisenberg, et al., 2013, p.336). Research into teachers' perspectives is still a relatively new area, and evidence on how elementary school educators perceive the teaching of sexuality education is especially lacking. This particular study was designed to fill this gap as it pertains to the recently mandated sexuality education curriculum in Quebec, and examines the factors associated with elementary school teachers' intentions to comply with and implement the curriculum.

Despite the increasing demand for teachers to teach sexuality education, research suggests that educators continually express some apprehension in doing so (Fegan, 2010; p.23; Cohen & Sears, 2012, p.299). Consequently, this exploratory research study makes an important

contribution to our understanding of SBSE by unveiling the lived experiences of those responsible for delivering such curriculums-the teachers! Referring to curriculum theory, the theory of planned behaviour and reflexive theory and practice, the purpose of this study was to determine the factors teachers identify as influencing their ability, attitude, and willingness to implement the sexuality curriculum in Quebec elementary schools. In doing so, we are able to identify the barriers and support systems in place and assess curricular implementation efforts.

From the analysis of the surveys three main themes emerged: teachers' perspectives on the delivery of sexuality education (i.e., by who and at what age); effective supports and strategies for implementation; and the barriers or limitations to successful implementation. These findings highlight the ways in which teachers conceptualize the sexuality curriculum and reportedly operationalize it in their classroom setting, while also accounting for teacher-perceived supports and barriers.

Prior research has explored teachers' critiques of SBSE, and the factors associated with implementation fidelity. These studies point to several factors that may facilitate or hinder curricular implementation. These well-cited factors include knowledge, training, and education; school leadership; the allocation of resources, funding, and time management; curricular documents and policy; and educator variables such as comfort and confidence teaching the curricular objectives. At best, teachers are well educated, prepared, and supported to implement a sexuality education curriculum. However, most research concerning SBSE reveals the opposite. These studies point to shortcomings in teacher training; insufficient time, funding, and resources; restrictive policies; the lack of administrative support; the fear of parental backlash; and teacher discomfort.

Consistent with the relevant literature, this study confirms that implementing a sexuality education curriculum is a complex task with several barriers to overcome. This study also asserts that successful implementation in schools is highly dependent on the teacher and their perception of the curriculum, their degree of preparation, and their attitude towards teaching sexuality education. The eight teachers surveyed in this study experienced many limitations when implementing the sexuality curriculum that are in line with the past research findings and each will be discussed in detail below.

Concerns with the Curriculum

Vigorous debates concerning what constitutes an age-appropriate approach for school-based sexuality education are apparent in public discourses and empirical research. The results of this study, in particular, show that while teachers may be committed to teaching sexuality education, they also have questions and concerns regarding the curriculum. As revealed through their narratives, several participants in the study expressed concerns about the content and structure of the Quebec sexuality curriculum. Many participants shared beliefs that the curriculum begins too early and is too explicit.

However, research consistently shows that children of school-entry age are capable of "understanding appropriate vocabulary, sex and gender differentiation, relationships, roles, pregnancy and birth, concepts of privacy and safety, and many other topics" (Goldman & Coleman, 2013, p.286). Bragg (2006) argues that teachers that fear sexuality education is 'inappropriate' or 'too explicit' risk espousing discourses of childhood innocence. In turn, they may fail to impart the important knowledge and skills necessary for youth to critically negotiate the hypersexualized media culture and content they encounter in their everyday lives.

Interestingly, the teachers that participated in this research study seemed to share mixed or negative reviews on the importance they assign to sexuality education, which does not replicate previous research findings. In most studies exploring SBSE teachers uniformly rate sexuality education with high importance and note an alignment between their personal beliefs and the intentions of the curriculum.

The responses provided by the participants in this study suggest these teachers may assign less importance to sexuality education or they are overwhelmed and overburdened by the curriculum and their new role as sexuality educators. A plausible explanation for this variance can be drawn from the recruitment procedures. It is widely known that the individuals who participate in sexuality research may be biased toward sex-positivity, meaning they have positive and progressive attitudes towards sexuality and feel comfortable engaging in these discourses. Since this research study used purposive and convenience sampling, the teachers that were recruited could have agreed to participate in the study for a variety of reasons outside of simply being motivated by sexuality discourses. Similarly given the fact the survey was conducted during teachers' third year implementing the novel curriculum and during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers' responses may be reflective of these exterior stressors. The literature suggests teacher perspectives and concerns may change over time as curricular innovations are implemented. Therefore, research tracking teachers' perspectives and experiences implementing sexuality curricula should be ongoing (Bialoyk, 2019, p.31).

Inadequate Support & Preparation

The results of this study found that the majority of teachers do not feel they are adequately prepared to provide comprehensive sexuality education. When asked to describe their

greatest challenge implementing the new sexuality curriculum, the teachers' responses generally related to feeling unsupported and unprepared. A perceived lack of support from parents and educational leaders presented a challenge for respondents. In addition, teachers who felt unprepared cited the lack of resources, time, and training. These results replicate the findings of other research studies, which highlight the impact of teacher preparation in curricular implementation fidelity (LaChausse, Clark & Chapple, 2014, p.53).

This study found that for many teachers strong support from school leaders, administrators, and colleagues eased their concerns about teaching sexuality education. This is consistent with the literature, which has found that teachers' perception of the quality of support they receive can either facilitate or hinder curricular implementation efforts (Rigby, 2017, p.85; Mkumbo, 2012, p.150).

In the same vein, fear of parental opposition or backlash has also been shown to impede teachers' provision of SBSE (Milton, 2003, p.253; Mkumbo, 2012, p.150. The participants in this study expressed concerns that they do not receive enough support from parents. Among the participants, there was also a consensus that the responsibility to educate children on sexuality topics should be shared with the parents. This is reflective of the data presented in Weaver's (2002) study of New Brunswick parents' attitudes toward sexual health education at school and home.

Another theme that emerged in this work was the lack of resources and time to enact the sexuality curriculum. Limited access to resources was a commonly cited complaint. Many respondents suggested that teaching resources were either unavailable, limited, or too difficult and time-consuming to access. Several participants requested for the Ministry of Education to develop approved lesson plans and materials that could be readily available to teachers of all

grades and all schools. Without easy-to-access, age-appropriate materials and services, teachers may, unintentionally, undermine the objectives of the curriculum.

This study also discovered that Quebec teachers feel they have inadequate time to cover all of the curriculum's expectations. Barriers such as the lack of time and resources have many implications for teaching. As the literature illustrates, these barriers are likely to influence the coverage and scope of curricular topics (Eisenberg et al., 2013, p.340).

Despite the province's increased emphasis on sexuality education and decision to mandate the curriculum, the number of training opportunities available for pre-service and in-service teachers does not reflect this growing demand (Rigby, 2017, p.83). Indeed, the majority of the participants sampled reported that they received little or no training, which is consistent with previous research. Those who did receive training described their dissatisfaction with the quality of the training they received. This suggests that in addition to more widely available training programs an evaluation of the effectiveness of these programs is also needed (Rigby, 2017, p.83).

The fact many educators are expected to teach sexuality education with no professional preparation is highly problematic. Sexuality discourses are complex and sensitive topic areas that require reflective and inclusive educators. In line with reflexive theory and practice, teachers need time to reflect, explore, and engage in sexuality education pedagogies. Successful implementation of SBSE is arguably an outcome of these processes. However, as pointed out in this research and other studies, teachers are missing these opportunities. It should be no surprise, that there is ample research that concludes the lack of support and preparation and inadequate training opportunities are all barriers to effective curricular implementation.

Teacher Variables

The results of this study found that teachers' attitudes and comfort in teaching sexuality topics can impact curricular implementation. From the analysis of teachers' narratives, it is evident that most participants in this study are uncomfortable and unwilling to teach the new sexuality curriculum, which resonates with the literature review.

Previous studies highlight teachers' comfort as an important variable that can either facilitate or hinder curricular implementation. In this study, the teachers surveyed expressed discomfort in teaching sexuality education. This was especially noticed in the responses of the cycle two and three teachers and male respondents. Similar results were found in a study conducted by Langille et al., (2002) in which they explored the barriers to school-based sexual health education in Nova Scotia. They found that discomfort was observed most prominently in male teachers (Langille et al., 2002, p.254). It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the level of comfort in teaching sexuality education varies with teachers' gender and other circumstances (Langille et al., 2002, p.255).

Research also shows that teachers' motivation and attitude are essential to program fidelity. Therefore, how teachers implement a curriculum will be influenced by their attitudes towards it. Azjen's theory of planned behaviour was used as the theoretical framework of the study as it is useful for conceptualizing teaching sexuality education as behaviour and it appropriately captures the precursors to curricular implementation (Azjen, 1985; Eisenberg et al., 2012, p.325).

The theory of planned behaviour proposes three conceptual determinants or variables that are needed to predict intention and behaviour (Azjen, 1991, p.188; Haney et al., 1996, p.974).

They include the attitude toward the behaviour, the subjective norm, and the perceived behavioural control (Haney et al., 1996, p.974).

The application of the theory of planned behaviour in this particular study reveals teachers' low or poor intention to perform the behaviour (i.e., teach sexuality education). Participants responses suggest that they (1) hold unfavourable or negative attitudes toward the sexuality curriculum (attitude toward the behaviour); (2) they believe that school leaders, administrators and colleagues don't value sexuality education (subjective norms); and (3) they perceive teaching the sexuality curriculum as difficult given the obstacles in the way (perceived behavioural control). Relevant studies have also found that even when teachers have positive attitudes, they can fail to implement curricular changes due to contextual factors out of their control such as time, resources, materials, and professional development (Zhao et al., 2020, p.5).

Implications

In their role on the "front line" of sexuality education, teachers play an important part in the successful implementation of the Quebec sexuality curriculum. Therefore, it is important to gather anecdotal evidence of teacher-identified strengths and limitations during these province-wide, initial phases. The participants' narratives demonstrate how their personal experiences have led them to think about and enact the sexuality curriculum in their classroom. Many of the shortcomings described by the participants have also been identified in previous studies and may explain why these education initiatives have failed in the past. Therefore, unveiling these constraints provides a wealth of information that can be used to develop interventions to better support and empower Quebec primary school teachers' efforts to teach the sexuality curriculum.

Recommendations

This research arrives at a set of recommendations on how to best support the implementation of the sexuality curriculum in Quebec elementary schools. Contributing to the body of research on SBSE, this study identified various factors that may influence why some Quebec teachers are willing and motivated to manifest the sexuality curriculum in their classrooms while others appear more resistant and uneasy (Rigby, 2017, p.85). Reflecting on these challenges the teachers in this study generally referenced the need for better curricular resources; more explicit support from parents, school leaders, and school board members; and greater access to training and education (Rigby, 2017, p.82). Consequently, these recommendations regarding policy and practice call on curriculum designers; post-secondary institutions offering teacher education; school leaders and administrators; the Quebec Ministry of Education and board members; and, of course, teachers. Specifically, I propose using these research findings in consultation with the various stakeholders to develop strategies on how to address and, ultimately, eliminate the barriers hindering the successful implementation of the sexuality curriculum as it enters its fourth year.

Curriculum Designers, Policy Makers & Teachers

Although the Quebec sexuality curriculum "has much to offer in terms of its forward-thinking, comprehensive and inclusive content" (Rigby, 2017, p.90), several participants in this study described it as vague and difficult to implement. Most teachers would benefit from a clear, well-crafted policy to support teaching comprehensive sexuality education. Therefore, I recommend curriculum designers collaborate with elementary school teachers to revise and update policy and curricular documents to meet these needs.

Past research has demonstrated the importance of engaging teachers in curricular change. Unfortunately, the creation and delivery of curriculum movements are overwhelmingly initiated through top-down approaches (Haney et al., 1996, p.986). This is one of the critiques made by curriculum theorists. They suggest that to facilitate curricular implementation teachers must share an active role in the planning, implementing, and evaluation processes. With this in mind, I also recommend that teachers are regularly consulted to identify the barriers and support systems in place and assess curricular content and implementation efforts. In doing so it fosters a reciprocal relationship among policy or curriculum makers and teachers and it aims to bridge any gaps between curricular expectations and classroom realities. I also suggest that additional documents are created specifically for parents so they may co-teach aspects of the sexuality curriculum at home. This would aim to unite in and out of school learning and ensure the pedagogical responsibility is shared among teachers and parents.

Ministry of Education & Administrators

In addition to curriculum designers and teachers, the Ministry of Education, school board members, administrators, parents and even partners in the community all share a responsibility for sexuality education. The Education Act stipulates that "every school board is responsible for ensuring that the programs of study are implemented" (Joyce, 2015, p.47). Since many respondents described feeling unsupported and unprepared, it forces the question of how schools and school boards are fulfilling their responsibility for sexuality education (Joyce, 2015, p.47). Administrators and school boards must ensure that sexuality education is a priority in their school philosophy and among their staff.

Consequently, I recommend they devote special attention to the promotion and support of sexuality education. This may include releasing clear statements regarding their support for the sexuality curriculum and those teaching it or offering additional teacher training and professional development workshops in SBSE.

While teaching the sexuality curriculum certainly gives teachers "experience" more opportunities are needed for in-service teachers to participate in sexuality education training (Milton, 2003, p.252). Teacher training or professional development workshops are critical for success because they provide opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills of practicing teachers (Barr et al., 2014, p.400). In this case, they provide teachers with the knowledge, skills, and guidelines necessary to competently teach sexuality education. As Milton (2003) describes, "good teaching in any curriculum area mandates that teachers be given regular opportunities to participate in courses to further develop their skills in program planning and delivery, to reflect on their attitudes and values, and to update and extend their knowledge" (p.252).

Training for the sexuality curriculum in Quebec has mostly relied on "train the trainer" models, in which a small group of teachers are trained in sexuality education and then expected to "train" their colleagues. I suggest that each teacher would benefit from training in comprehensive sexuality education and should be offered these professional development opportunities. I also recommend that refresher courses be offered regularly in order to keep up with evolving public discourses.

At the school level, it is important to develop or maintain strong parental relationships and support for all school programs. I suggest that schools hold parent information sessions in which the sexuality curriculum and content can be openly discussed. These meetings can be used to ease any parental concerns regarding the curriculum and, in turn, reduce teachers' fear of

parental backlash for teaching such topics. Similarly, it will provide an overview of the sexuality education students will receive at school so parents may continue these conversations at home.

For the greater community and province, I suggest it is the responsibility of the Quebec Ministry of Education to engage in public discourse around the actual content of the sexuality curriculum, and invest in public relations to resolve or further reduce any controversy regarding comprehensive SBSE (Rigby, 2013, p.87)

Post-Secondary Institutions

Post-secondary institutions also share a role in enriching sexuality education. In order to deliver consistently high-quality sexuality education in schools, teachers must receive appropriate education and training to implement these programs—tasks that could be best achieved through Bachelor of Education programs. However, the review of the literature demonstrates that most Bachelor of Education programs in Canada do not provide sexual health courses. Considering graduates from these programs will be responsible for teaching sexuality education in Quebec, it is alarming that these programs are not part of the compulsory course credit. As McKay & Barrett (1999) point out, we missed the opportunity to "provide systematic training in the theory and practice of sexual health education at the earliest point in a potential teacher's training" (p.100).

I argue that it is important for the Ministry of Education to acknowledge the roles of universities in preparing pre-service teachers for their future roles in teaching sexual health education. I recommend that members of the Ministry of Education and university faculty for teacher-preparation programs engage in an open dialogue to review the academic standards. In addition, I suggest they integrate a methodology course in sexuality education into the existing

curriculum. Teacher candidates should have the opportunity to explore the expectations of the sexuality curriculum and gather resources during their degree so upon graduation, they are confident and competent teachers of sexuality education.

Combined with prior findings regarding SBSE, we can conclude that a multi-level approach involving all stakeholders is needed to overcome the current obstacles concerning the implementation of the Quebec sexuality curriculum. The results of this study provide important feedback for the Ministry of Education on how their mandate is being received and implemented at the classroom level and what teachers need to ensure the curriculum is adopted and administered successfully. Curriculum designers and policy workers should work with teachers to review and evaluate curricular documents. The Quebec Ministry of Education, school administration, board leaders, and teachers need to take a more unified stance and continue to work to overcome the unique challenges associated with teaching sexuality education. School boards could also benefit from providing improved training opportunities for in-service teachers. Finally, universities could align their teacher education programs to meet the growing demands to prepare pre-service teachers to deliver sexuality education. Admittedly, these recommendations may be difficult to enact, but realizing them is not impossible!

Limitations

There are important limitations to consider in the scope of this study. The major limitation of this research project is the small population size. Only eight elementary school teachers participated in the survey, which, in relation to the number of primary school educators in the province of Quebec, is very minute. This limits the applicability of the findings within

scholarly communities. As this research study was small in scope, my findings cannot be generalized and so this study does not profess to represent all teacher experiences.

Another limitation relates to the methodological approach. This study only gathered data from qualitative surveys; therefore, it is possible participants provided limited or unreliable responses. With surveys, the validity of responses cannot be verified. There is always the possibility that respondents may misinterpret the questions, or give incomplete or indefinite responses, and the researcher is not there to repeat or clarify questions. Similarly, the researcher cannot ask respondents to elaborate on certain ideas. Surveys may highlight trends or attitudes, but because participants and the researcher cannot engage in an open dialogue they may fail to expose or explain the reasons for these outcomes. Despite these limitations, qualitative research gives value to different voices and perspectives. Given the scope and exploratory nature of this study, a self-report survey was deemed a sufficient method of assessing teachers' understanding of the sexuality curriculum and willingness to teach it.

Finally, as a student, researcher, and elementary school teacher, I recognize my subjective position within the research limits the claims being made as I am personally invested in the research topic. To overcome this challenge, the thesis provides detailed information regarding the research process, methodologies, and data analysis by extracting quotes directly from the participants' narratives.

Areas for Future Research

The results of this study and its limitations indicate several directions for future research. The present study employed a survey methodology to assess teachers' perspectives and experiences teaching the Quebec sexuality education curriculum. Additional research is needed

to develop a better understanding of the lived experiences and needs of these elementary school teachers. Future research should expand on this study in size and scope. It would be valuable to conduct a large-scale research project consisting of a wider sample of Quebec teachers that accounts for other variables such as gender, and religious or political affiliations. Future research could also compare if rural or urban settings have an impact on teacher perceived barriers. It would also be interesting to assess pre-service and in-service teachers' understanding of the sexuality curriculum. Future research should strive to obtain a representative sample so more profound conclusions could be drawn.

The results of this study could lead to more research on the ways to properly prepare pre-service and in-service teachers to teach sexuality education. More research on what builds teachers' confidence and willingness to teach sexuality topics are needed. Future research investigating these themes could use interviews and focus groups to collect the data.

Finally, while there is extensive literature around SBSE for adolescents, there have been fewer studies that focus on the sexuality education given to primary school children. This study began to fill that gap as it focused uniquely on the experiences of elementary school teachers; however, more research is needed to have a comprehensive understanding of these teachers' experiences especially within the unique context of Quebec.

Concluding Comments

The experiences reported by the eight elementary school teachers in this study are a first step to better understand how teachers are using, understanding, and experiencing the recently mandated sexuality curriculum in Quebec. The inquiry revealed a snapshot of the current climate in elementary schools surrounding sexuality education and determined what factors facilitate and

hinder curricular implementation efforts. By exploring these teacher-perceived supports and barriers, this study has built on past research to offer further insight on how to better prepare teachers and, in turn, improve the quality of SBSE. It is my hope that as teachers continue to navigate the curriculum and receive supportive interventions, sexuality education will translate into a positive, comprehensive, and empowering experience for students and teachers!

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Recruitment Email

Dear (insert name),

My name is Felicity Burns and I am a master's student at McGill University. I am currently conducting a qualitative research study to explore the lived experiences of elementary school teachers as they teach the newly mandated sexuality education curriculum in Quebec. As such my research will specifically ask: how are teachers using, understanding and experiencing the sexuality education curriculum in Quebec elementary schools?

For this study, I am simply looking for elementary school teachers who are willing to share their experiences. I was hoping you might be interested in participating. Please see the invitation below for more details.

Thank you.

Best regards,

Felicity Burns
McGill University
Department of Integrated Studies in Education
(819)570-1994
felicity.burns@mail.mcgill.ca

Mindy Carter, Supervisor
McGill University
Department of Integrated Studies in Education
514-398-4527 Ext. 094457
mindy.carter@mcgill.ca

Seeking participants for an online survey on sexuality education in elementary schools. The study will explore the lived experiences of elementary school teachers as they teach the recently mandated sexuality education curriculum with reference to the Quebec Education Program. The survey will be anonymous and include structured, open ended questions. It will require approximately an hour to complete.

Participants must have taught at an elementary school in Quebec during the 2018-2019, 2019-2020 or 2020-present academic years and they must have specifically taught the sexuality curriculum. Participation is completely voluntary.

Findings from this research study will serve to improve the quality and consistency of implementing the mandated sexuality curriculum in schools across the province of Quebec. Participation in the qualitative study will provide a space to critique the strengths and limitations of the sexuality curriculum and its implementation.

If you are interested in participating, **you may access the consent form and survey directly using the following link: https://surveys.mcgill.ca/ls3/589451?lang=en**

The deadline to submit the survey is **Monday, March 29th, 2021 at 9:00 am**

To request more information on the survey please contact Felicity Burns at felicity.burns@mail.mcgill.ca, or her supervisor Mindy Carter at mindy.carter@mcgill.ca.

Appendix B: Personal Invitation

Hi (insert name),

I hope this email finds you well.

I remember that you had expressed interest in my master's thesis. My research will explore the lived experiences of elementary school teachers as they teach the newly mandated sexuality education curriculum in Quebec. As such my research will specifically ask: how are teachers using, understanding and experiencing the sexuality education curriculum in Quebec elementary schools?

I am moving into the data collection phase and I am looking for participants. Involvement in the study would entail answering an online survey. The survey will be anonymous and include structured, open ended questions. It will require approximately an hour to complete.

I was curious if you would you be interested in participating in the study? If you are interested in participating, **you may access the consent form and survey directly using the following link: https://surveys.mcgill.ca/ls3/589451?lang=en**

The deadline to submit the survey is **Monday, March 29th, 2021 at 9:00 am**

If you have any questions or would like more information on the study, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best regards,

Felicity Burns
McGill University
Department of Integrated Studies in Education
(819)570-1994
felicity.burns@mail.mcgill.ca

Mindy Carter, Supervisor
McGill University
Department of Integrated Studies in Education
514-398-4527 Ext. 094457
mindy.carter@mcgill.ca

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form

McGill

Department of Integrated Studies in Education
Département d'études intégrées en éducation

McGill University
Faculty of Education
3700 McTavish Street
Montreal, Quebec,
Canada H3A 1Y2

Université McGill
Faculté des sciences de l'education
3700 Rue McTavish
Montréal, Québec,
Canada H3A 1Y2

Tel/Tél : (514) 398-4527
Fax/Télécopieur: (514) 398-4529
www.mcgill.ca/dise/

Researcher:
Felicity Burns
Second Year Master's Student
McGill University Faculty of Education
Cell Number: 819-570-1994
Email: felicity.burns@mail.mcgill.ca

Supervisor:
Dr. Mindy Carter
McGill University Faculty of Education
Phone Number: 514-398-4527 Ext. 094457
Email: mindy.carter@mcgill.ca

Title of Project: Teachers' Perspectives and Experiences Teaching the Mandated Sexuality Education Curriculum in Quebec Elementary Schools

Sponsors:
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC): Joseph Armand Bombardier Canadian Graduate Scholarship
Fonds de Recherche du Québec Société et Culture (FRQ-SC): Master's Research Scholarship

Purpose of the Study:
You are invited to participate in a research study on sexuality education in elementary schools. This research project will explore the lived experiences of elementary school teachers as they teach the recently mandated sexuality education curriculum as defined by the *Ministère de l'Éducation et Enseignement Supérieur* in Quebec. This study will provide teachers an opportunity to critique the strengths and limitations of the sexuality curriculum and its implementation. As such any differences between what is envisioned through curricular objectives and what is actually enacted in classrooms can be identified and adapted to support meaningful teaching and learning for all.

Study Procedures:
Participants in this study will complete an online survey regarding their experience implementing the recently mandated sexuality education curriculum. The online survey will be administered using the platform, McGill Lime Survey. The survey will include structured, open ended questions and it will require approximately an hour to complete. The online survey will be anonymous and no identifiable information will be collected.

Voluntary Participation:
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please note that once the survey has been submitted, the information cannot be withdrawn because it is anonymous.

Potential Risks:
As this study is centered on sexuality education in elementary schools, there is a small risk that some participants may feel uncomfortable expressing their thoughts. The topics of sexuality can be seen as sensitive and personal subjects. Participants may experience a range of emotions such as anxiety or discomfort when writing about these topics.

Potential Benefits:
The research study will provide a better understanding of the lived experiences of elementary school teachers in Quebec as they teach the recently mandated sexuality education curriculum. Such targeted analysis may inspire more extensive research projects to further investigate the quality and consistency of implementing the sexuality curriculum in schools across the province of Quebec. Participation in the qualitative study will provide teachers the opportunities to reflect on their teaching perspectives and practices. It will also provide a space to critique the sexuality curriculum, including the training or preparation received, curricular content, resources, and required support. Participating in the study will allow teachers the opportunity to engage in critical reflection on the topic of sexuality in a safe and supported space.

Compensation: No compensation.

Confidentiality:
No identifiable information will be collected. The surveys will be anonymous, and each participant will be identified with a pseudonym. Therefore, when information regarding this study is shared the participants will be referred to as their coded identity. The survey information will not be used by anyone else.

The anonymous surveys will be kept on secure, password protected files and computers of the principal investigator (PI: Felicity) and her supervisor. All data files will also be password protected and securely stored on a USB and locked in a filing cabinet in the McGill Education Building. The data will be kept for 10 years.

The results of this study will be disseminated in the thesis of the principal investigator, in academic peer-reviewed articles and other publications intended for the general public, as well as conference presentations. The research findings may also serve to inform Quebec curriculum designers.

Yes: _____ No: _____ You have read the above information and consent to participate in the survey. The data will be stored for up to 10 years.

Agreeing to participate in this study does not waive any of your rights or release the researchers from their responsibilities.

Questions:

If you have any questions or would like any parts of the project to be clarified, please contact: Felicity Burns at felicity.burns@mail.mcgill.ca

“If you have any ethical concerns or complaints about your participation in this study, and want to speak with someone not on the research team, please contact the McGill Ethics Manager at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca