

A Content Analysis of Québec's K-11 *Sexuality Education* Program Using UNESCO Guidelines

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### Abstract

The *Sexuality Education* program in Québec has been mandated across all schools in the province, however its English-language content had not yet been evaluated in the context of evidence-based practices. The present study used content analysis to explore the efficacy of Québec's *Sexuality Education* content by determining how well it follows established guidelines. This research was grounded in a constructivist Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis theoretical approach, rooted in critical policy studies. English-language *Sexuality Education* program documents were compared with UNESCO's *International technical guidance on sexuality education*. A framework analysis approach to data analysis allowed themes to emerge from the data inductively while also providing the opportunity for UNESCO's themes to map deductively onto the existing program. Analysis of Québec's program revealed a lack of overall specificity and depth among 6 of the 8 learning themes. Of UNESCO's recommendations for comprehensive sexual education content development, 7 of 10 recommendations were not met with sufficient detail. Thorough skills-based content such as communication, decision-making, media literacy, and navigating services were notably absent, especially within an intersectional framework. These findings demonstrate a need for more detailed and intersectional Sexuality Education program content, especially while teacher training in the province is still in the process of being implemented. More research is needed to contextualize the implications of the findings with regard to the program's implementation and evaluation.

## Resumé

Le programme *Éducation à la sexualité* au Québec a été obligé dans toutes les écoles de la province, mais son contenu en anglais n'avait pas encore été évalué dans le contexte d'une approche factuelle. Cette étude a utilisé l'analyse de contenu pour explorer l'efficacité du contenu du programme *Éducation à la sexualité* au Québec en déterminant dans quelle mesure il suit les lignes directrices établies. Cette recherche était basée sur une approche théorique constructiviste de l'analyse politique basée sur l'intersectionnalité, ancrée dans des études critiques. Les documents du programme *Éducation à la sexualité* en anglais ont été comparés aux *Principes directeurs internationaux sur l'éducation à la sexualité* de l'UNESCO. Une approche d'analyse de cadre pour l'analyse des données a permis aux thèmes de se dégager des données de manière inductive tout en donnant aux thèmes de l'UNESCO l'occasion de se cartographier par déduction sur le programme existant. L'analyse du programme québécois a révélé un manque de spécificité globale et de profondeur parmi 6 des 8 thèmes d'apprentissage. Parmi les recommandations de l'UNESCO pour l'élaboration de contenus complets à la sexualité, 7 des 10 recommandations n'ont pas été satisfaites avec suffisamment de détails. Les contenus fondés sur les compétences pour la santé et le bien-être, comme les techniques de communication, la prise de décision, la maîtrise des médias et sexualité et trouver de l'aide et du soutien, étaient notamment absents, en particulier dans un cadre intersectionnel. Ces constatations démontrent la nécessité d'un contenu plus détaillé et intersectionnel du programme *Éducation à la sexualité*, en particulier alors que la formation des enseignants dans la province est toujours en cours de mise en œuvre. Des recherches supplémentaires sont nécessaires pour contextualiser les implications des résultats en ce qui concerne la mise en œuvre et l'évaluation du programme.

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My eternal gratitude goes to the community organizations who trained me, and others like me, to provide sexuality education to students when it was not legally necessary, but ethically necessary. Head & Hands and ACCM truly embody the idea that imparting trust in a young person's agency is just as important as sharing information.

### **List of Acronyms**

ACCM: AIDS Community Care Montreal

CSE: Comprehensive Sexuality Education

GBV: Gender-Based Violence

HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus

IBPA: Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis

LGBTQI2SNA+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Two-Spirit, Non-Binary, Asexual, and more identities

MEES: Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur

MELS: Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport

PHAC: Public Health Agency of Canada

PEP: Post-exposure prophylaxis

PrEP: Pre-exposure prophylaxis

QEP: Québec Education Plan

SIECCAN: Sex Information and Education Council of Canada

SIECUS: Sex Information and Education Council of the United States

STBBIs: Sexually Transmitted and Blood Borne Infections

STIs: Sexually Transmitted Infections

SRH: Sexual and Reproductive Health

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

VMMC: Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision

WHO: World Health Organization



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## Chapter 1: Introduction

As a young person who fell between the cracks of the Québec Education Plan, I didn't know what sex was, but I knew I shouldn't know about it. I had to rely on myself, my peers, and the Internet for sex education. My friends and I experienced the serious consequences of the Ministry's decision to eliminate a mandatory sex education program in 2005, and throughout my high school years, I became the informal sex educator of my peer group. The more we needed this education, the more frustrated I became by the seemingly arbitrary restrictions that had been placed on my access to knowledge. As I learned about the role of community organizations in filling this curriculum gap, I began volunteering at organizations such as Head & Hands and AIDS Community Care Montreal (ACCM) as a peer facilitator. This allowed me to create a space for open dialogue about gender and sexuality, and to co-create knowledge with the participants in the room with the idea that everybody could learn from one another, including the facilitator. Today, I continue to be driven by this constructivist epistemological framework as a researcher, and I believe that this framework is especially important in fields such as sexuality education, which require us to hold multiple potential truths and experiences.

In 2018, Québec's *Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur* (MEES) stipulated that the teaching of specific sexuality education content is mandatory in Québec elementary and high schools through a program entitled *Sexuality Education*, which is complimentary to the Québec Education Plan (QEP) curriculum (Gouvernement du Québec, 2017). The content in this complimentary *Sexuality Education* program was designed to enable students to "better understand themselves, establish emotional relationships that show respect for themselves and others, and develop critical thinking and good judgment along with a sense of responsibility" (Gouvernement du Québec, 2018). Age-appropriate content is expected to be

delivered to students by teachers, support staff, or external facilitators for a range of 5-15 hours per year.

Learning content of the program is divided by the following themes: **(1)** comprehensive view of sexuality; **(2)** sexual growth and body image; **(3)** identity, gender stereotypes and roles, and social norms; **(4)** emotional and romantic life; **(5)** sexual assault/sexual violence; **(6)** sexual behaviour; **(7)** pregnancy and birth; and **(8)** sexually transmissible and blood-borne infections (STBBIs) (Gouvernement du Québec, 2018). According to the Ministry of Education, this curriculum aims to be comprehensive, positive, and all-encompassing of human potential and curiosity (Gouvernement du Québec, 2018).

Motivated by my own experience as a young person struggling to access non-judgmental and relevant information, and later as a gender and sexualities educator in various community and school contexts, I hope to ensure that all Québec youth receive adequate sexuality education by taking this initial step as a researcher to explore and evaluate the program through content analysis.

## **Rationale**

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) refers to a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality, aiming to equip youth with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realize their health, well-being and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and, understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives (UNESCO, 2018). Research has shown that CSE programs can increase the age of a first sexual experience, increase the use of condoms and other contraceptives, and increase sexual knowledge and self-esteem, while

reducing unprotected sex, number of sexual partners, frequency of sexual intercourse and risk taking (UNESCO, 2018). In addition, programs which are adequately diverse and inclusive of the gender and sexual identities and expressions represented in the student body promote student safety, physical and emotional health, diversity and equity, as well as student engagement and academic success for all students, regardless of how they may identify (Meyer, 2010).

However, the efficacy of a comprehensive sexuality education program relies in part on pertinent, detailed and accessible content. In Québec, the *Sexuality Education* program has been mandated for all students in elementary (grades 1-6) and secondary/high school (grades 7-11) as of September 2018, and is optional for students in Kindergarten. Despite this mandate, the program's content has not yet been evaluated, and it is unclear whether it serves the youth for whom it is intended. Learning content can have a direct impact on the learning outcomes of students, including their sexual behaviours, sexual health, knowledge, and attitudes surrounding sexuality and gender.

Program documents from the Ministry of Education are especially important to consider when more research is needed to determine the state of teacher training in sexuality education. During the educational reform in which sexuality education was not mandatory, which lasted from 2005-2018, studies found that Québec teachers needed and wanted additional training in delivering sexuality education (Beaulieu, 2010; Christman, 2014; Dowd, 2010). Québec teachers require opportunities to learn about sexuality and think critically about how to deliver this material before teaching it (Garcia, 2015; Trimble, 2012). Teachers have received little guidance on who will be required to teach the material, or how the 5-15 hours of *Sexuality Education* program content will be integrated into other courses such as English, French, Science, or History (Rukavina, 2018) More broadly, teachers often feel unprepared and

uncomfortable engaging with sexuality education content because of a lack of training, concern about their own expertise, or the intimacy of the subject matter (Buston et al., 2002; Csincsak et al., 1994; Trimble, 2012).

### **Research Aims**

A content analysis of Québec's *Sexuality Education* program has not yet been conducted in comparison to established evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education guidelines. The aim of this thesis is to evaluate how well the content of the *Sexuality Education* program aligns with best practices and guidelines. Through this analysis, I hope to explore how the content of the *Sexuality Education* program can offer insight into the way the Ministry of Education envisions healthy sexuality and what the learning content of such a program should be.

### **Objectives**

The purpose of this study is to explore how well the content of Québec's *Sexuality Education* program follows established guidelines by using a framework analysis method to compare program documents to UNESCO's *International technical guidance on sexuality education*. Findings will be grounded in an Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis theoretical approach, which captures different dimensions of policy contexts and their outcomes. Program data will also be examined within a social, cultural, political, and historical Québec context, in order to provide contextually appropriate analyses and recommendations for administrators, policymakers and researchers.

### **Research Question**

To achieve these aims and objectives, the present study proposes the following question:  
How well does the content of Québec's *Sexuality Education* program follow established best practices and guidelines?

**Thesis Structure**

The thesis is organized as described: following this Introduction, Chapter Two reviews the existing literature on sexuality education standards and grounds the current study in a Québec context. Chapter Three describes the methodology used to explore the research question in this study, and Chapter Four presents the research findings, organized by thematic content of the data. Chapter Five provides a discussion and interpretation of the findings, along with an exploration of potential implications, a balanced discussion of the strengths and limitations of the study, recommendations for program implementation and evaluation, and future directions for administrators, researchers, and policymakers.

## Chapter 2: Comprehensive Review of Relevant Literature

In order to evaluate how well the content of Québec's *Sexuality Education* program follows established best practices and guidelines, it is important to first situate the current study in the context of broader literature. This comprehensive review of the field of sexuality education will cover the goals and learning outcomes of sex education according to national and international guidelines, recommended content found in sexual health education programs and curricula, and will situate this research in a Québec context.

Within the literature, the terms “sex education,” “sexuality education,” and “sexual health education” are sometimes used interchangeably. According to the World Health Organization (WHO)'s working definition, sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life, and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, and reproduction. WHO states that sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles, and relationships; all of which can be influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious, and spiritual factors (World Health Organization, 2006). By extension, sexual health is defined by WHO (2011) as “a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality,” emphasizing that it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. WHO states that sexual health requires “a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence” (p. 2). It is important to note that this definition of sexual health includes more than just the prevention of negative outcomes. Just as the definition of sexual health provides a holistic view of human sexuality, comprehensive sexuality education also equips people with the information and skills



necessary to enhance their sexual health, by addressing the individual, their interpersonal relationships, and their community at large.

### **Sexuality Education Program Goals and Learning Content**

Research-driven guidelines of the desired outcomes and learning content of comprehensive sexuality education programs are particularly helpful in guiding the analysis of curricula and program content. This section will provide an overview of the most prominent guidelines in the field of sexual health education, with a focus on program goals and learning content.

Clear, measurable goals are crucial for the success of educational programs, including sexuality education curricula. They offer clarity of purpose, accountability for stakeholders, and they ensure that the evaluation of desired outcomes can be appraised. According to the Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN), the overarching goal of comprehensive sexual health education is to enhance the ability of an individual to achieve and maintain sexual health and well-being over their lifetime (SIECCAN, 2019). The council's *Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education*, published in 2019, stipulate that specific goals can be divided into two categories: enhancing sexual health and wellbeing, and preventing outcomes that can have a negative impact on sexual health and wellbeing. SIECCAN has further divided these two goals into 11 subgoals, which can be found in Table 2.1. According to the guidelines, comprehensive sexual health education curricula should include the following components: information, motivation/attitudes, behavioural skills, and environmental factors that affect sexual health and well-being.

Table 2.1. The Goals of Comprehensive Sexual Health Education (SIECCAN, 2019)

## Goal 1: Enhancement of sexual health and well-being

- 
1. 1 Increase in self-acceptance, self-esteem, self-image, comfort, and confidence related to sexuality.
  1. 2 Increase in capacity to have and ensure healthy, consensual, respectful, equitable, mutually beneficial, and satisfying interpersonal relationships.
  1. 3 Increase in awareness of and capacity to access sexual and reproductive health services (including STI testing, treatment and prevention services, as well as contraceptive services).
  1. 4 Increase in awareness of, and respect for, human rights related to sexuality and reproductive health.
  1. 5 Increased capacity of parents and guardians, teachers, and sexual health educators to deliver high quality sexual health education (e.g., increased knowledge of teaching strategies, increased skills, and comfort).
  1. 6 Increased capacity for self and group advocacy related to sexual health and well-being

## Goal 2: Prevention of outcomes that can have a negative impact on sexual health and well-being

- 
2. 1 Decrease in the acquisition and transmission of STIs.
  2. 2 Decrease in unintended pregnancies.
  2. 3 Decrease in sexual problems (e.g., problems with sexual response, relationship problems that negatively impact sexual health and well-being).
  2. 4 Decrease in sexual coercion/trauma/assault/abuse/harassment.
  2. 5 Decrease in discrimination and violence based on sex (i.e., variations in reproductive or sexual anatomy, including intersex), gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and STI status.

In addition to the aforementioned goals, SIECCAN (2019) has outlined nine core principles of comprehensive sexual health education which should inform the planning and teaching of sexual health education in Canada. The council stipulates that comprehensive sexual health education is accessible to all people inclusive of age, race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, STI status, geographic location, socio-economic status, cultural, or religious background, ability, or housing status (e.g., those who are incarcerated, homeless, or living in

care facilities). CSE promotes human rights including autonomous decision-making and respect for the rights of others, is scientifically accurate and uses evidence-based teaching methods, and is broadly-based in scope and depth and addresses a range of topics relevant to sexual health and well-being (SIECCAN, 2019). Curricula must be inclusive of the identities and lived experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, two-spirit, non-binary, and asexual people (LGBTQI2SNA+), and other emerging identities while also promoting gender equality and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence (SIECCAN, 2019). The council also stipulates that curricula must incorporate a balanced approach to sexual health promotion that includes the positive aspects of sexuality and relationships as well as the prevention of outcomes that can have a negative impact on sexual health and wellbeing. Finally, CSE should be responsive to and incorporate emerging issues related to sexual health and well-being, while being provided by educators who have the knowledge and skills to deliver comprehensive sexual health education and who receive administrative support to undertake this work (SIECCAN, 2019).

UNESCO, in partnership with WHO, published the *International technical guidance on sexuality education* in order to assist authorities in the development and implementation of comprehensive sexuality education programs and materials, and also to be used as a guide to best practices for stakeholders involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of these programs internationally (2018). The guidelines outlined by UNESCO emphasize the need for programs informed by evidence, adapted to the local context, and designed to measure and address beliefs, values, attitudes, and skills which have been shown to affect health and wellbeing with regard to sexuality.

The key concepts and learning objectives outlined in the UNESCO guidelines aim to equip youth with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that will empower them to realize their health, well-being and dignity, consider the well-being of others affected by their choice, understand and act upon their rights and respect the rights of others (2018). UNESCO recommends meeting these goals by providing “scientifically-accurate, incremental, age- and developmentally-appropriate, gender-sensitive, culturally relevant and transformative information about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality”; allowing youth to “explore values, attitudes and social and cultural norms and rights impacting sexual and social relationships”; and, “promoting the acquisition of life skills” (2018, p. 34).

Based on an assessment of young people's sexual and reproductive health (SRH) needs, UNESCO offers detailed learning outcomes, divided broadly into eight key concepts: relationships; values, rights, culture and sexuality; understanding gender; violence and staying safe; skills for health and wellbeing; the human body and development; sexuality and sexual behaviour; and, sexual and reproductive health (2018). Within each of these topics, the three domains of learning – knowledge, attitudinal, and skills-building – are featured in the learning objectives per age group. Knowledge allows learners to build a critical foundation, while the attitudinal domain helps them shape their understanding of themselves, sexuality, and their environment. Lastly, skills-building enables learners to develop competencies in communication, listening, refusal, decision-making and negotiation; interpersonal; critical thinking; building self-awareness; developing empathy; accessing reliable information and services; challenging stigma and discrimination; and advocating for rights (UNESCO, 2018). Research has shown that a combination of knowledge, attitudinal and skills-building domains is critical for effective CSE and for fostering youth empowerment (UNESCO, 2018).

UNESCO has also devised nine recommendations for the development of curriculum content. When developing the curriculum content, it is recommended that clear goals, outcomes and key learnings are established to determine the content, approach and activities of the program. Curricula are most effective when their goals are clear, specific, and tailored to the learner. Health and behavioural outcomes are generally the focus of sex education programs, but effective content should also focus on the development of positive attitudes, values and skills that contribute to healthy relationships, gender equality, human rights and diversity (UNESCO, 2018). Topics should also be covered in a logical sequence, starting with motivating students to explore values, attitudes, and norms before addressing more concrete knowledge, attitudes and skills. Activities should be context-specific and promote critical thinking in order to encompass the diverse socio-economic backgrounds, sexual orientations, gender identities, family and community values, religions, and abilities of learners (UNESCO, 2018). Curricula should also address consent and life skills to support youth in assessing potential risk and negotiating the practice of protective behaviours. In addition, programs should provide scientifically accurate information about HIV and AIDS and other STIs, pregnancy prevention, early and unintended pregnancy, and the effectiveness and availability of different protection methods (UNESCO, 2018). It is also important to address how biological experiences, gender and cultural norms affect the way youth experience and navigate their sexuality and their sexual and relationship health more generally. Specific risk and protective factors about particular sexual behaviours should also be addressed clearly and consistently, in addition to discussions on how to manage specific situations that may lead to STIs, unwanted or unprotected intercourse, or violence (UNESCO, 2018). Similarly, individual attitudes and peer norms surrounding condoms and contraceptives should be addressed. In addition to these recommendations, it is also crucial to

provide practical information about the services available to address the health needs of youth, including sexual and relationship health needs (UNESCO, 2018).

### **The Canadian Landscape**

In Canada, education falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education within each province or territory, resulting in a large variance of sex education programming across the country. In addition, while a province or territory's curriculum may outline learning outcomes and content for each grade level, teachers are responsible for delivering content according to their professional judgment, which highlights the importance of adequate teacher training in sex education. Across Canada, publication dates of health curricula range from 1995 to 2020, some of which have no specific stated requirements or suggested dates for renewal (Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, 2020). Most curricula lack learning goals, pedagogies, guiding principles or approaches which are evidence-based or reflective of today's realities (e.g. use of social media or cell phones) (Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, 2020). The amount of time dedicated to sex education also varies across curricula, and for some, teachers are required to integrate sex education topics into classes such as language arts and mathematics.

The Québec education system also differs significantly in structure from the rest of Canada, primarily due to its religious, linguistic, and cultural roots (Robson, 2019). The history of private schools in Québec has been theorized to trace back to the colony of New France during the 1600s, when Catholic church-run schools were associated with the ruling elite (Magnuson, 1993). While educational reforms have nearly eliminated religious schools, English and French language public school boards have since formed, and the public funding of private education in Québec has served to popularize enrolment (Robson, 2019). Similar to public schools, private schools are still mandated to employ accredited teachers and to teach the

provincial curriculum. In addition to the developmental influence of Québec's educational structures, French is also defined as the official language of the provincial government according to the Charter of the French Language, also known as Bill 101. Under this law, the language of educational instruction is French, and a child cannot receive instruction in English unless the parents of a student request it and the child meets the following criteria (article 73): a child whose father or mother is a Canadian citizen and received elementary instruction in English anywhere in Canada, provided that that instruction constitutes the major part of the elementary instruction he/she received in Canada; or, a child whose father or mother is a Canadian citizen and who has received or is receiving elementary or secondary instruction in English in Canada, and the brothers and sisters of that child, provided that that instruction constitutes the major part of the elementary or secondary instruction received by the child in Canada (Gouvernement du Québec, 2013). Official English-language versions of French-language documents from the MEES and other governmental agencies can be difficult to access, and are sometimes unavailable.

### *History of sex education in Québec*

The mandate of Québec's Ministry of Education (MEES) is to implement the provisions of the Education Act, a document which governs the rights and obligations of stakeholders such as students, teachers, schools, and school boards in Québec ("Education Act," 2020). The MEES also authors the Québec Education Program (QEP), which is designed to provide a common-core basic education by promoting the development of competencies.

The Personal and Social Development program, which began in the 1980s, was eliminated with the implementation of the QEP in 2001. This educational reform aimed for the development of a range of competencies, and sexuality was included under the "Health and Well

Being” component of “broad areas of learning.” As the reform was implemented, sexuality education became non-compulsory. Although the QEP emphasized a shared responsibility among educators and support staff for delivering sex education, this shared responsibility ensured that nobody was held accountable if it was not provided to students (Duquet, 2003). While implementation guides were published by the MELS, research has shown that there existed limited incentives to help schools identify people willing to teach sexuality education, and a lack of funding prevented adequate implementation of suggested content (Descheneaux et al., 2018).

A survey conducted by MELS in elementary and secondary schools in Québec focusing on sexuality education activities revealed that their planning and topics discussed with the students varied greatly between schools, both at the elementary and secondary levels. This survey, along with consultations with representatives from the education network indicated that several schools had difficulty mobilizing their teams to ensure sexuality education was being delivered based on the themes proposed by MEES (Jetté, 2017). In 2012, an internal survey conducted by MELS revealed that 80% of schools were only partially providing sexuality education—Québec students were receiving inconsistent instruction, with no standardization of course quality (Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, 2020). These data, along with petitions led by local community organizations, led to the development of a pilot program, in which the present-day *Sexuality Education* program was born.

The *Sexuality Education* program was piloted by 19 public and private schools spanning the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years (Jetté & Zouaghi, 2017). Surveys were used to document the factors that facilitated or hampered the implementation of the curriculum, and to analyze the contribution of the MEES in planning, implementing and overseeing the



implementation of the learning content. The pilot aimed to define learning in sexuality education for each year of education spanning from preschool, elementary and secondary school, and aimed to ensure that this learning was made compulsory after the duration of the pilot. After two years, the *Sexuality Education* program officially became mandatory in all Québec schools, including public schools operating under school boards and service centres, and independent private schools. However, it is unclear whether all of the feedback given by teacher and administrators during the pilot project has been incorporated, especially regarding access to English-language teaching materials.

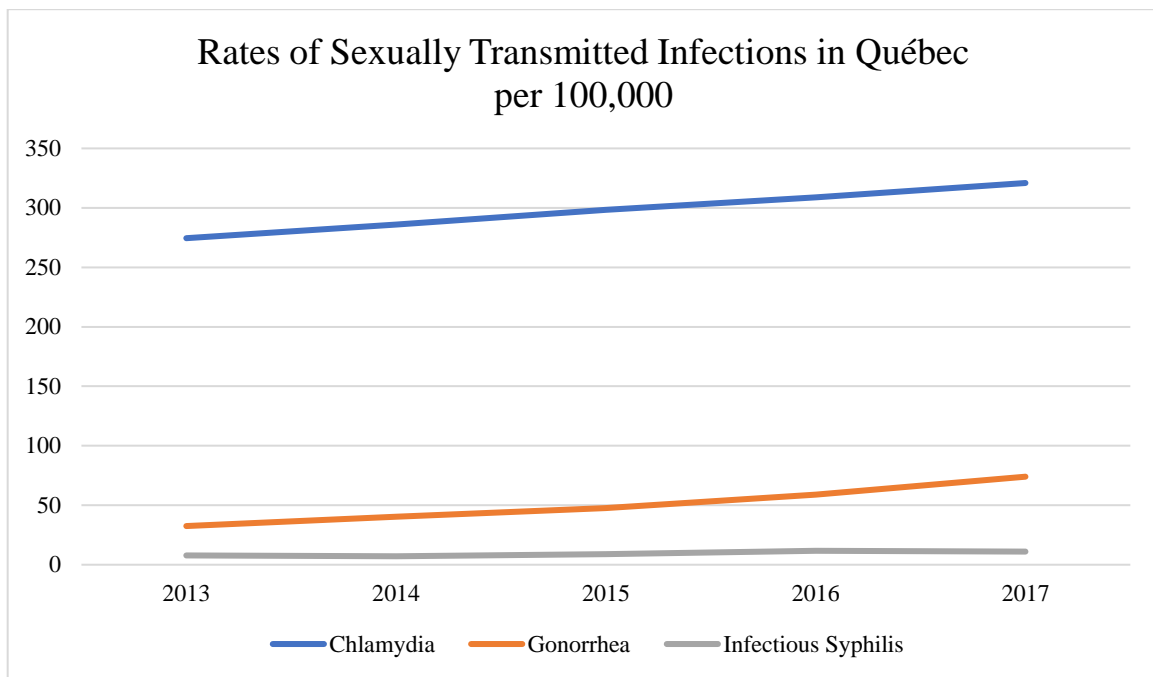
### ***Why is comprehensive sexuality education important?***

Although the prevention of negative outcomes is not the sole focus of comprehensive sexual education, national data on indicators of sexual health such as unwanted pregnancies and STBBIs can assist researchers, educators and policy makers in the planning and implementation of effective curricula. Data collected from 2015-2016 as part of the Canadian Community Health Survey examined sexual behaviours, condom use and other contraceptive use among sexually active 15- to 24-year-olds (Rotermann & McKay, 2020). Québec was found to have a statistically significantly greater ( $p < 0.05$ ) percentage of sexually active youth at 62.2% compared to the rest of Canada at 54.1%, including when looking at males (60.5%) and females (64.0%) separately. Québec was also found to have a statistically significantly lower ( $p < 0.05$ ) percentage of youth who used condoms during their last sexual intercourse at 48.0% compared to Canada (60.1%), including those who had one partner (41.6%), and multiple partners (59.1%). Condom use is an especially relevant indicator of sexual health because it reduces the likelihood of STBBI transmission and unwanted pregnancies. The most common reasons for not using a

condom during last intercourse was because the respondent was in a monogamous relationship (47.6%), they used another method (44.1%), and they did not think they were at risk of an STI (24.0%). To date, robust statistics which are more inclusive of people identifying outside the gender binary and trans people in Québec are not available. This study also excluded people living on reserves and other Indigenous settlements, people in two health regions in northern Québec, full-time members of the Canadian Forces, the institutionalized population, and youth aged 12 to 17 living in foster homes. These groups represent about 3% of the target population (Rotermann & McKay, 2020).

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), STIs continue to be a significant public health concern in Canada, levying a significant physical, emotional, social, and economic cost to individuals, communities, and society (2019). While STIs are technically preventable and either curable or manageable, they have been increasing over time. In Canada, between 2008 and 2017, the rates of chlamydia increased by 39%, gonorrhea by 109% and infectious syphilis by 167% (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2019). Rates of STIs have also been increasing in Québec, as demonstrated in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1. Rates of Sexually Transmitted Infections in Québec from 2013–2017 (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2019)



In 2018, PHAC published the *Pan-Canadian Framework for Action* after conducting surveys and consultations with people living with HIV and hepatitis, representatives of First Nations, Inuit and Metis organizations, clinicians and other health professionals, community-based and civil society organizations, researchers, provincial and territorial governments, and representatives of the pharmaceutical industry, while paying special attention to engaging and balancing gender and age perspectives across a variety of populations. The framework outlines three goals, all of which can be met in part by sexuality education: (1) reduce the incidence of STBBI in Canada; (2) improve access to testing, treatment, and ongoing care and support; and (3) reduce stigma and discrimination that create vulnerabilities to STBBI. PHAC cites a lack of holistic, comprehensive, and consistent sexual health education as one of the driving factors

contributing to trends in STBBI rates in Canada, and maintains that stakeholders in Canada should be held responsible to include education and awareness initiatives in their programming.

Of the negative outcomes mitigated by CSE programs, rates of sexual violence are pervasive, and more challenging to assess than public health statistics such as STBBI rates. Although the prevalence of sexual violence is difficult to accurately measure, a number of sources may be aggregated to determine an estimate, including peer-reviewed studies, youth protection service data, and police service data. One study of child sexual abuse among a representative sample of Québec high school students found that a total of 14.9% of girls and 3.9% of boys reported having experienced child sexual abuse, defined as unwanted or forced touching, including penetration (Hébert et al., 2019). Another Québec study found that approximately 22.1% of females and 9.6% of males reported having been a victim of at least one sexual assault with physical contact before the age of 18, which was equivalent to 16% of the Québec population (Tourigny et al., 2008). Across youth protection data, police service data and population service data, girls are victims of sexual abuse two times as often as boys (Institut national de santé publique Québec, 2017). This indicates that the issue of child sexual violence is often also a form of gender-based violence. It is important to note that reported rates are affected by access to trusted adults who are obliged to report any incidence of child abuse; due to events such as the COVID-19 pandemic with its stay-at-home mandates, ensuring children's safety at home becomes especially difficult when reporting frequently occurs within the school environment. Sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination is also a significant issue especially among Indigenous people, people of colour, LGBTQIA people, those living in northern or rural communities, people with disabilities, new migrants, children and youth, and seniors (Status of Women Canada, 2018). This underscores the need for education related to

recognizing sexual violence and facilitating consent in relationships, but also recognizing how intersecting lived experiences such as age, gender identity, gender expression, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class and ability can have an impact on incidence of violence and access to resources.

As illustrated by SIECCAN and UNESCO guidelines, positive outcomes are equally as important to the enhancement of sexual health and well-being as the prevention of negative outcomes. Therefore, the emphasis of positive health outcomes is equally important in a comprehensive sexual education curriculum. Research has shown that sexual satisfaction in romantic relationships is positively correlated to physical health, overall life satisfaction, and well-being (del Mar Sánchez-Fuentes et al., 2014; Flynn et al., 2016; SIECCAN, 2019). For LGBTQI2SA+ individuals, positive feelings about one's own sexual orientation or gender identity are also correlated to positive health and well-being outcomes (Johns et al., 2018; Petrocchi et al., 2020; SIECCAN, 2019). Comprehensive sex education can ensure the development of a healthy sexuality by addressing the individual, interpersonal and positive aspects of human sexuality (SIECCAN, 2019).

In addition to providing balance to a curriculum that may otherwise be focused on risk prevention, research has also shown that youth desire more learning content which highlights the positive aspects of sexuality. A meta-analysis of multiple studies comprising of over 6,000 interviews with youth has found a discrepancy between what youth want to learn and the education they have received (Descheneaux et al., 2018). Young people primarily want explicit knowledge about sex, relationships, emotions, communication, and pleasure. In contrast, adults believe that youth should be protected against STIs, violence, cyberbullying and sexual assault (Descheneaux et al., 2018).

### **Evaluating Sex Education Curricula**

The methods of evaluation of sex education curricula range from quantitative analyses of keyword searches to qualitative questionnaires. Within this range lies a variety of inductive and deductive content analysis approaches. In the case of analyzing curriculum content and documents, some research employs a dichotomous (yes or no) assessment of whether the curriculum addresses a particular topic (Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, 2020; Klein et al., 1994). Other studies also evaluate specific aspects within specific curricula or material, such as the presence of bias (e.g.: gender bias, sexual orientation bias, race bias, class bias), or the presence of explicitly anti-racist content within the curriculum (Klein et al., 1994; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). In the case of content analyses which aims to evaluate the presence of multiple topics of sexuality education, these categories are often formed deductively, based on existing guidelines from institutions such as Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), UNESCO, or WHO (Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, 2020; Klein et al., 1994; Marques et al., 2015). In contrast, some content analyses of curricula are inductive, in order to allow themes to emerge from the data (Hall et al., 2019). While each approach to research has its own strength and limitations, few studies have blended an inductive and deductive approach in order to reap the benefits of both.

### **Conclusion**

According to Canadian and international guidelines, effective comprehensive sex education can enhance sexual health and wellbeing while preventing negative outcomes through concrete information, activities to address an individual's attitudes, behavioural skills, and an

understanding of environmental factors. Learning content is clearly defined and can be modified to suit students' contexts, identities, and abilities, while still being guided by research-driven information about sexuality. Keeping the Québec context in mind, a content analysis of the new *Sexuality Education* curriculum in reference to technical guidelines is needed in order to evaluate its efficacy.

### **The Present Study**

The *Sexuality Education* program in Québec has been mandated across all schools in the province, however its English-language content has not yet been evaluated in the context of evidence-based guidelines. The present study addresses gaps in broader sex education content analysis methodologies, while also evaluating the efficacy of Québec's *Sexuality Education* content by determining how well it follows established best practices. Due to the multidimensional ways that sexuality and sexuality education can impact learners through their various lived experiences, this study will be grounded in an Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis approach, which is rooted in critical policy studies. English-language *Sexuality Education* program documents will be collected and parsed to facilitate a comparison with UNESCO's *International technical guidance on sexuality education*. A framework analysis approach to data analysis will allow themes to emerge from the data inductively while also providing the opportunity for UNESCO's themes to map onto the existing program deductively.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of the study is to explore how well the content of Québec's *Sexuality Education* program follows established guidelines by using a framework analysis method to compare program documents to UNESCO's *International technical guidance on sexuality education*. In this chapter, I describe the research design used to frame the issue, including the equity-focused theoretical approach grounded in critical policy studies, the method of data collection, and the method of data analysis used.

#### Research Design

##### *Theoretical approach*

The present study grounds its theoretical approach in critical policy studies, and more specifically in an intersectionality-based framework. According to Fischer, Torgerson, Durnová, and Orsini (2015), critical policy studies focus on the policymaking process, which focuses on two key concerns: how policies are decided in a political setting, and the practices of policy analysis, particularly how they address the development and assessment of policies and their outcomes. Critical policy analysis is not only concerned with processes as inputs and outputs, but also in terms of the interests, values, and normative assumptions that shape and inform these processes (Fischer et al., 2015). A study grounded in a critical policy analysis approach may acknowledge that policy rhetoric differs from practiced reality, especially in terms of social stratification (Diem et al., 2014)

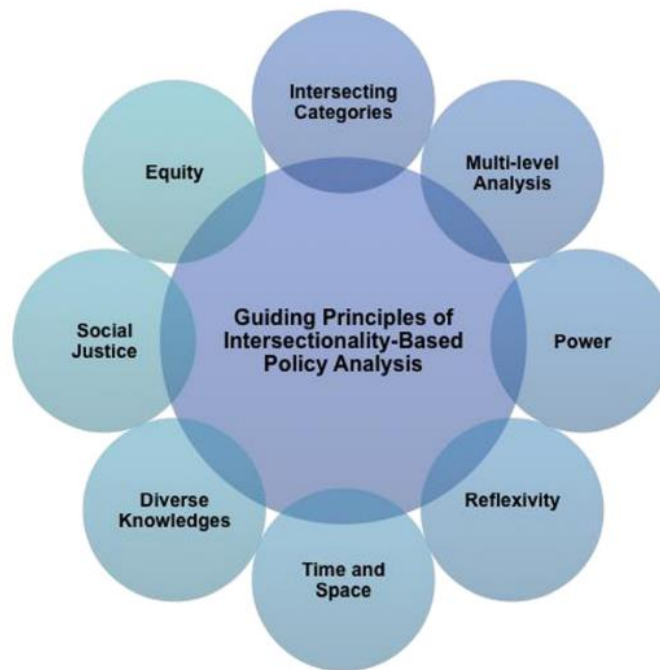
Hankivsky et al. (2014) have developed an Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis (IBPA) Framework which provides a theoretical framework for the current study. IBPA aims to capture different dimensions of contexts within policy, including "history, politics, everyday lived experiences, diverse knowledges, and intersecting social locations" (2014, p.1). These



dimensions have the capacity to generate transformative insights, knowledge, policy solutions and actions that are seldom gleaned from other equity-focused frameworks. In addition, this framework was developed collaboratively and iteratively, based on a series of meetings, peer feedback, and critical reflection. IBPA is meant to be flexible and applicable to a variety of contexts, which makes it ideal for examining the multi-dimensional issue of developing effective sexuality education content.

The framework itself is comprised of two core components: a set of guiding principles (Figure 3.1), and a list of twelve overarching questions which contextualize policy problems and their responses in terms of social inequities (Figure 3.2). These components are intended to be used flexibly and in tandem, with the guiding principles grounding the questions and their sub-questions, to ensure that each is informed by an intersectionality-informed analysis. Guiding principles of IBPA include: multi-level analysis, power, reflexivity, time and space, diverse knowledges, social justice, equity, and intersecting categories (Hankivsky et al., 2014, p.1). The questions are categorized as “descriptive” and “transformative.” Descriptive questions are intended to both generate critical background information about policy processes and mechanisms in their full context, and to reveal assumptions that underpin government priorities, the populations targeted for policy interventions, and what inequities and privileges are created by current policy responses. Transformative questions are intended to assist in identifying alternative policy responses aimed at social and structural changes that reduce inequities and promote social justice (Hankivsky et al., 2014).

Figure 3.1. Guiding Principles of Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis (Hankivsky et al., 2014)



An equity-focused and critical approach is necessary when examining public policies surrounding sexuality education. Research has shown that marginalized demographic groups such as people with diverse gender and sexual identities and expressions, intersex people, people of colour, Indigenous people, people with disabilities, and people who have a lower socio-economic status are all substantially affected in various domains by the quality of sexuality education received. Topics such as sexuality and gender are often moralized and laden with assumptions, and this methodological approach was chosen for its specific emphasis on questioning those assumptions. It also makes explicit the notion of reflecting on positionality and subjectivities as a researcher, which is crucial in maintaining the rigour of qualitative research.

Figure 3.2. Descriptive and transformative overarching questions of Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis (Hankivsky et al., 2014).



## Method of Data Collection

### Sexuality Education *program*

This study's research question is explored using English-language documents published by the Québec Ministry of Education pertaining to the *Sexuality Education* program. Materials used in the *Sexuality Education* program analysis were found on Québec's Ministry of Education website. I selected any document specifically pertaining to the *Sexuality Education* program which was mandated to be taught in schools as of September 2018. These official documents published by MEES include *Learning Content in Sexuality Education* (MEES, 2018c), *Detailed*

*content in sexuality education* for kindergarten, elementary, and secondary levels (MEES, 2018a, 2018b), and *Sexuality Education: Information for parents of students with handicaps, social maladjustments or learning difficulties* (MEES, 2020b). Details about these documents can be found in Table 3.1.

I also considered text-based information regarding the *Sexuality Education* program published on the Ministry of Education's website in July 2020, which is subject to updates over time. This included information related to curriculum planning and division of responsibilities, support offered to the school network, and roles of the school and the family. This was not included in the content analysis but served to inform the discussion of the program's implementation in Chapter 5. Information related to the 2015-2017 pilot project for the *Sexuality Education* program was not specifically included as a form of data, however it served to inform the literature review found in Chapter 2 and to contextualize the current program as it is designed today.

Table 3.1. Sexuality Education *program documents*.

<b>Title</b>	<b>Date published</b>	<b>No. pages</b>	<b>Content</b>
Learning Content in Sexuality Education	2018	24	Context, vision of sexuality, vision of sexuality education, and summary tables per theme.
Detailed Content in Sexuality Education – Kindergarten & Elementary	2018	10	Information separated by learning theme, and further subdivided by grade level. Each learning theme includes a section titled “Why do students need to learn this?”

Detailed Content in Sexuality Education – Secondary	2018	15	Information separated by learning theme, and further subdivided by grade level. Each learning theme includes a section titled “Why do students need to learn this?”
Sexuality Education: Information for parents of students with handicaps, social maladjustments or learning difficulties	2020	2	General information on the content of the <i>Sexuality Education</i> program, with elaboration on why sexuality education is relevant and important for students with disabilities.

### Method of Data Analysis

The *Sexuality Education* program was analyzed using Framework Analysis (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002). This approach of data analysis was specifically chosen for its flexibility in combining both inductive and deductive forms of analysis. The research question focuses on examining how well the content of Québec's *Sexuality Education* program follows best practices and guidelines, requiring a method of analysis which allow themes to emerge from the data while simultaneously focusing on codes found in research-driven sex education guidelines. As such, Framework Analysis allows for emergent themes to arise directly from the data, but also supports UNESCO guidelines to further focus on important themes and codes, demonstrated by previous research. Research has demonstrated that youth want to learn explicit information about sex, relationships, emotions, communication, and pleasure, and UNESCO reflects these themes, among others, within its guidelines (Descheneaux et al., 2018). Microsoft Excel was used to manage and analyze data from the Québec program documents and to draw comparisons between the curriculum and the guidelines.

### ***Framework Analysis***

Framework Analysis is a method of qualitative content analysis which involves summarizing and classifying data within a thematic framework (Green & Thorogood, 2013). It was initially developed for use in large-scale policy research, and although it is commonly used in health and medical research, its applications are widespread (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002). Framework Analysis provides a systematic process of sifting, charting, and sorting data by themes (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002). The framework offers a set of methods to organize and analyze data in a matrix, making it easier to examine data individually by cases (rows), and across cases by codes (columns). Analysis is partitioned into a series of steps which facilitate a “constant comparative method,” helping the researcher make systematic comparisons across cases to refine each theme (Gale et al., 2013). This method specifically selected for this study because of its versatility in analyzing themes in the data, which proves especially useful with the thematic and developmental divisions of the Learning Content found in Québec’s *Sexuality Education* program.

Ritchie and Spencer (2002) have outlined specific procedures in order to guide researchers in conducting a Framework Analysis. To begin, I familiarized myself with the data to gain a holistic understanding of their contents. Familiarization involved reading and re-reading the *Sexuality Education* program documents in order to acquaint myself with any content or themes that could arise.

The second step of the process entailed identifying a thematic framework to develop a coding scheme for the data. This thematic framework is influenced by the themes emergent in the data, as well as any a priori issues informed by the research aims of the study. For the purpose of the current study, the UNESCO guidelines were used to inform the analysis of the

*Sexuality Education* program's content, and these were reflected in the index categories created for analysis. After categories were identified, I systematically annotated the full *Sexuality Education* program using the thematic framework, or "index," I created in the previous step. The following step, charting, enabled me to view the data as a whole. I summarized and re-arranged the data in a chart in order to sort text by the themes created in the indexing step.

After the data was thoroughly charted according to themes, the final step of mapping and interpretation began. According to the study's research question, one main objective of the analysis was to examine how well the content of Québec's *Sexuality Education* program followed established guidelines. This objective guided the process of reviewing the data and focused my efforts to search for patterns and explanations within the program, using UNESCO guidelines to frame the issue.

## Chapter 4: Research Findings

The purpose of the current study was to use content analysis to explore how well the content of Québec's *Sexuality Education* program follows best practices and guidelines. A framework analysis method was used to compare English-language program documents published by the Ministry of Education to UNESCO's *International technical guidance on sexuality education*. An Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis (IBPA) framework, described in Chapter 3, was used to ground the study's theoretical approach. This chapter will summarize main findings of Québec's learning content, organized by program theme, and will analyze UNESCO's content development recommendations in relation to the *Sexuality Education* program.

### Data Cleaning

All the learning content from publicly available English documents pertaining to the *Sexuality Education* program was formatted into cells using an Excel spreadsheet. These cells were subsequently annotated and compared with another column containing UNESCO's key concepts and learning content. UNESCO's technical guidance also contains specific content development recommendations which were used as a reference for characteristics of an effective CSE curriculum.

### Main Analyses

#### *Description of Québec documents*

The Ministry of Education has provided three documents pertaining to the learning content of the *Sexuality Education* program, and one specifically related to students with disabilities. A more detailed description of the contents of these documents can be found in Figure 4.1.



Figure 4.1. Description of information found in Ministry of Education documents on the *Sexuality Education* program.

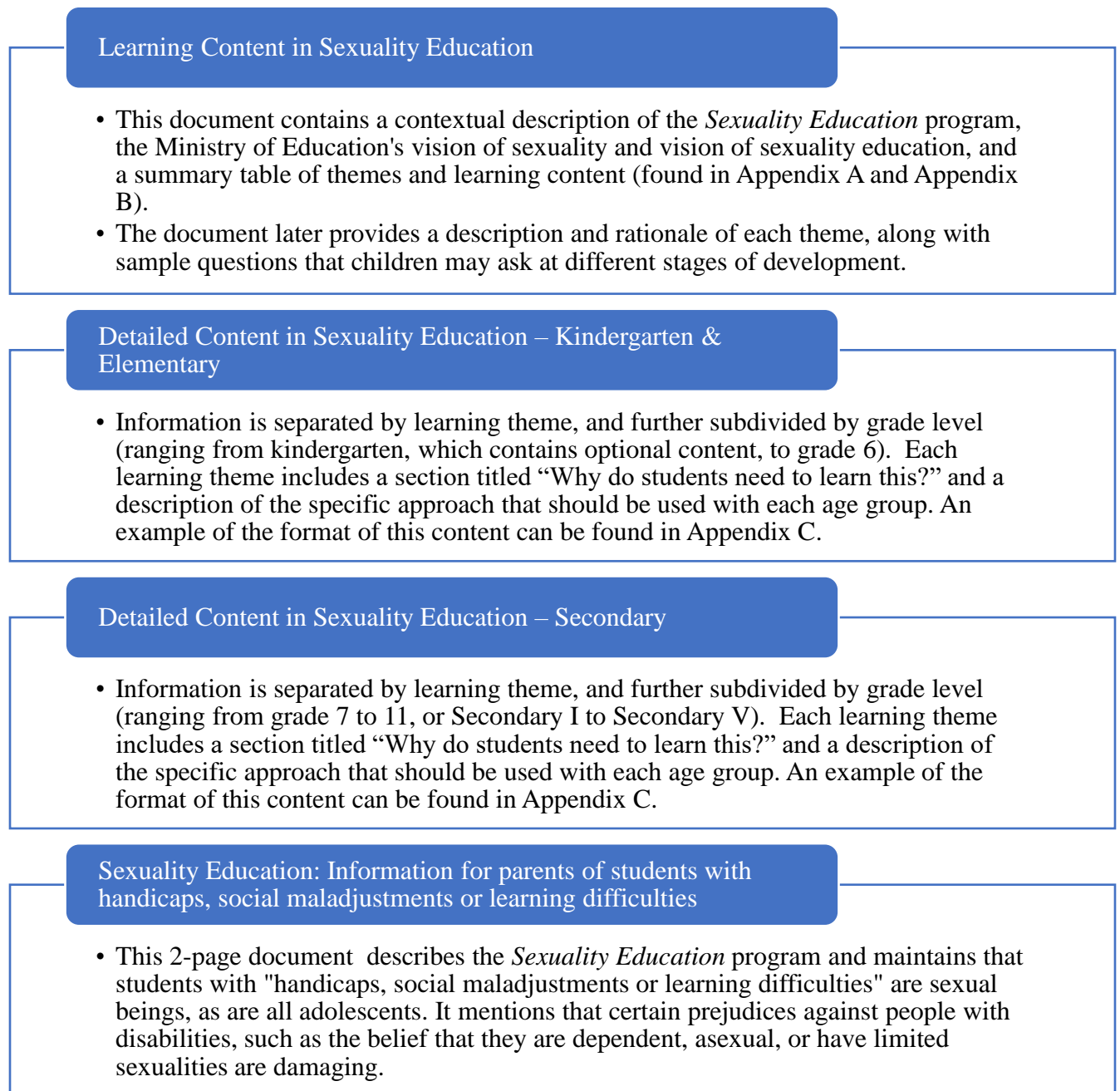


Table 4.1. Evaluation of *Sexuality Education* program compared to UNESCO key concepts

Québec's <i>Sexuality Education</i> Program		UNESCO Key Concepts
Sexual growth and body image	X	The human body and development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sexual and Reproductive Anatomy and Physiology</li> <li>• Reproduction</li> </ul>
Pregnancy and birth	!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Puberty</li> <li>• Body Image</li> </ul>
Identity, gender stereotypes and roles, and social norms	!	Understanding gender <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Social Construction of Gender and Gender Norms</li> <li>• Gender Equality, Stereotypes and Bias</li> <li>• Gender-based Violence</li> </ul>
Emotional and romantic life	!	Relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families</li> <li>• Friendship, Love and Romantic Relationships</li> <li>• Tolerance, Inclusion and Respect</li> <li>• Long-term Commitments and Parenting</li> </ul>
Sexual assault / sexual violence	X	Violence and staying safe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Violence</li> <li>• Consent, Privacy and Bodily Integrity</li> <li>• Safe use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)</li> </ul>
Comprehensive view of sexuality	✓	Sexuality and sexual behaviour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sex, Sexuality and the Sexual Life Cycle</li> <li>• Sexual Behaviour and Sexual Response</li> </ul>
Sexual behaviour	✓	
Sexually transmissible and blood-borne infections (STBBIs) and pregnancy	!	Sexual and reproductive health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pregnancy and pregnancy prevention</li> <li>• HIV and AIDS Stigma, Care, Treatment and Support</li> <li>• Understanding, Recognizing and Reducing the Risk of STIs, including HIV</li> </ul>
N/A	X	Values, rights, culture and sexuality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Values and Sexuality</li> <li>• Human Rights and Sexuality</li> <li>• Culture, Society and Sexuality</li> </ul>
N/A	X	Skills for health and well-being <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Norms and Peer Influence on Sexual Behaviour</li> <li>• Decision-making</li> <li>• Communication, Refusal and Negotiation Skills</li> <li>• Media Literacy and Sexuality</li> <li>• Finding Help and Support</li> </ul>

Legend:

- X : Most or all the recommended content is absent  
! : Some of the content is included, but detail is lacking  
✓ : Most or all the recommended content is included  
N/A: Not Applicable

**Sexuality Education *Program Vision***

The Québec *Sexuality Education* documents published by MEES do not contain explicit goals for the program. The *Learning Content in Sexuality Education* document describes a vision of sexuality, which is comprehensive, positive, human potential, and provokes curiosity.

According to MEES' vision, sexuality education makes it possible to acquire knowledge and to develop respectful, egalitarian attitudes and behaviour, and is rooted in values such as “equality between women and men, respect for diversity, respect for physical and psychological integrity, a sense of responsibility and well-being” (MEES, 2018c). A legend found in the margins of the detailed content documents also tags certain content with the following indicators: promoting egalitarian relationships, preventing sexual assault, preventing violence, promoting a healthy body image, respecting sexual and gender diversity, being aware of sexualization of the public space, and preventing STBBIs and pregnancy. These categories illustrate a dual emphasis on fostering positive health outcomes and the prevention of negative outcomes.

***Sexual Growth and Body Image / Pregnancy and Birth*****UNESCO: “The Human Body and Development”*****UNESCO: “Sexual and Reproductive Anatomy and Physiology”***

The aim of Québec's “Sexual growth and body image” theme is for students to learn to understand and appreciate their bodies. Québec's program abides by UNESCO's recommendations for learning content such as: identifying parts of the body and their functions, including genitals; understanding that reproduction requires the union of an egg and sperm; and recognizing that hormones can impact us during puberty. UNESCO suggests greater detail on the topic of hormones, especially as they relate to the menstrual cycle.

UNESCO suggests additional detailed learning content which the *Sexuality Education* program does not cover. This includes understanding that everybody has a unique body that deserves respect, including people with disabilities; and that all cultures have different ways of understanding sex, gender and reproduction, and when it is appropriate to become sexually active.

***UNESCO: “Reproduction”***

Québec's learning content on the topic of pregnancy is spread between the themes “Pregnancy and birth,” “Sexual growth and body image,” and “STBBIs and pregnancy.” Of the content in the “Pregnancy and birth” theme, which focuses on elementary school students, the following content is lacking which UNESCO recommends: understanding that pregnancy is a natural biological process and can be planned; recognizing that not all couples have children; and listing the health risks associated with early marriage, and early pregnancy and birth. Within the “Sexual growth and body image” theme, Québec does not contain recommended content addressing the difference between reproductive function and sexual feelings; the idea that men and women experience changes in their sexual and reproductive functions and desires throughout life; and the fact that not everybody is fertile, and that there are ways to address infertility in those who would like to conceive.

The *Sexuality Education* program refers to the following content recommended by UNESCO: understanding that pregnancy begins when an egg and sperm unite and implant in the uterus; changes in the mother's body while pregnant; the menstrual cycle; and recognizing signs of pregnancy. Although these topics are mentioned in the Québec program, UNESCO suggests greater detail overall, especially regarding the menstrual phase in which pregnancy is most able

to occur, reflecting on feelings about menstruation, understanding the stages of fetal development, steps to take for a healthy pregnancy and childbirth, and taking pregnancy tests.

***UNESCO: “Puberty”***

The *Sexuality Education* program follows content recommendations such as identifying the physical and psychological changes associated with puberty; the role of puberty in the body's ability to reproduce; hygiene; and physical responses that may occur during puberty, such as erections and wet dreams. Québec's program also contains an emphasis on sharing one's feelings about growing up, which is not stressed in UNESCO's guidelines.

However, UNESCO emphasizes content related to puberty which Québec's program fails to address. The international guidelines specifically recommend more detailed content on hygiene, including applying personal sanitation practices to a personal plan; and on menstruation, elaborating on physical symptoms and feelings girls may experience during this time, how to use sanitary pads and other menstrual aids, how gender inequality may contribute to girls' feelings of shame and fear during menstruation, and the importance of access to menstrual products, clean water and private toilet facilities during menstruation. UNESCO also recommends content regarding the similarities and differences between girls and boys in relation to pubertal changes; recognizing that puberty may be particularly challenging for children who are gender non-conforming, transgender or intersex; and acknowledging that teasing, shaming or stigmatizing others based on changes during puberty is harmful and may have long-lasting psychological impacts.

***UNESCO: “Body Image”***

UNESCO suggests detailed content pertaining to body image which overlaps slightly with Québec's *Sexuality Education* program content. Québec's content follows

recommendations related to the importance of appreciating and taking care of your body, the advantages of having a positive body image, and the idea that norms, standards and messages from peers, family, society and the media can influence body image.

Québec fails to cover specific content related to developing a healthy body image which is recommended by UNESCO. This content includes: understanding that a person's physical appearance does not determine their worth as a human being; showing acceptance of a variety of physical appearances; acknowledging that there is wide variation in what people find attractive; understanding that people's feelings about their bodies can affect their health, self-image and behaviour; and, recognizing that unrealistic standards about bodily appearance can be challenged.

### ***Identity, Gender Stereotypes and Roles, and Social Norms***

#### **UNESCO: "Understanding Gender"**

#### ***UNESCO: "The Social Construction of Gender and Gender Norms"***

The aim of Québec's "Identity, gender stereotypes and roles, and social norms" theme is for students to learn to understand themselves, reflect on stereotypes and develop egalitarian relationships. Among UNESCO's recommendations, the following content is recommended which Québec does not cover: the difference between biological sex and gender; the idea that a person's gender identity, the way they think of themselves and describe themselves is unique to them and should be respected; understanding that romantic relationships can be negatively affected by gender roles and stereotypes; and acknowledging the importance of challenging one's own and others' gender biases. Québec follows UNESCO's recommendation of discussing the harm of homophobia and transphobia, and the different sources of information on gender norms which learners can be exposed to. Québec's *Sexuality Education* program also

elaborates more than is suggested by technical guidelines about different ways of being and behaving beyond gender stereotypes, and recognizing the role of puberty in the consolidation of gender identity.

***UNESCO: “Gender Equality, Stereotypes and Bias”***

UNESCO suggests more specific content on gender equality, stereotypes and bias which Québec does not detail. For instance, Québec's program does not contain learning content which explicitly states that all people are equally valuable, regardless of their gender. Québec also does not state that gender inequalities and differences in power exist in families, friendships, relationships, communities and society, or that these inequalities can influence sexual behaviour and may increase the risk of sexual coercion, abuse and gender-based violence. Despite touching upon gender stereotypes, the *Sexuality Education* program does not state that gender stereotypes can lead to bias and inequality.

***UNESCO: “Gender-based Violence”***

While Québec's program touches upon violence in a dating relationship, including warning signs and occurrences, UNESCO explicitly highlights gender-based violence (GBV) as an issue. UNESCO goes into great detail regarding GBV as a violation of human rights, and emphasizes the fact that gender stereotypes can be a cause of violence and discrimination.

***Emotional and romantic life***

***UNESCO: “Relationships”***

***UNESCO: “Families”***

The *Sexuality Education* program includes information on different types of family models (nuclear families, single parents, same-sex parents, adoptive parents, blended families), preparing for a baby's arrival, providing for the needs of a newborn, and welcoming a baby either

at birth or at the time of adoption. UNESCO's guidelines provide greater detail regarding the ways in which children learn roles, values, and structure within their family; on gender inequality reflected in family roles; and, on how health and illness can affect a family's structure, capacities and responsibilities.

***UNESCO: "Friendship, love and romantic relationships"***

The aim of Québec's "Emotional and romantic life" theme is for students to learn to reflect on interpersonal relationships, friendships, and romantic relationships based on mutuality and reciprocity. Compared to UNESCO's recommended content, Québec emphasizes more detail concerning the experience of love and attraction in adolescence, challenges in first dating relationships, what may support a meaningful interpersonal and romantic relationship, and critical reflections on the portrayals of adolescent romantic relationships surrounding the learner. The *Sexuality Education* program follows UNESCO's recommendations of content regarding different kinds of friendships, feelings that may emerge in friendships (such as trust, sharing, respect, empathy and solidarity) and expressions of different kinds of love. However, UNESCO also suggests content which is lacking in the Québec program, namely concerning explicitly healthy and unhealthy relationships, the fact that friendships and love help people feel positive about themselves, and how inequalities and differences in power (due to age, gender, economic, social or health status) in relationships can negatively affect the relationship.

***UNESCO: "Tolerance, inclusion and respect"***

As is suggested by UNESCO, Québec's program covers the fact that discrimination based on gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation are harmful (sexism, homophobia, transphobia). However, UNESCO recommends detailed content on the topic of tolerance, inclusion and respect, and proposes that it is disrespectful and hurtful to harass or



bully anyone on the basis of their social, economic or health status, ethnicity, race, origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other differences, and that this is a violation of human rights.

Technical guidance also suggests to include content pertaining to the importance of challenging stigma and discrimination in order to promote inclusion, non-discrimination and diversity.

***UNESCO: “Long-term commitments and parenting”***

UNESCO suggests a series of topics regarding long-term commitments and parenting which Québec does not include. These topics consist of: discussion of marriage; child, early and forced marriages; the way long term commitments, marriage and parenting may be shaped by society, religion, culture and laws; factors involved in deciding when and if to have children; and a parent's responsibility in fulfilling their children's various needs.

***Sexual assault and sexual violence***

**UNESCO: “Violence”**

The aim of Québec's “Sexual assault and sexual violence” theme is for students to learn to prevent, to recognize and to report situations of sexual assault and sexual violence. UNESCO suggests content on violence including sexual assault, while Québec focuses more exclusively on sexual assault. UNESCO details how to recognize bullying and violence, and explicitly states that this is wrong, including between parents or romantic partners. Québec and UNESCO both touch upon recognizing situations of sexual assault, seeking support and playing an active role to prevent or stop violence in the context of a dating relationship.

***UNESCO: “Consent, Privacy and Bodily Integrity”***

Québec contains information recommended by UNESCO including the fact that everyone can decide who can touch their body, where, in what way; and the various situations which can impact someone's ability to give or assess consent. QC does not contain information on

unwanted sexual attention in a more general sense, nor does it go into detail about how consent is critical for healthy, pleasurable sexual behaviour with a partner.

Québec's curriculum also included a substantial amount of content related to sexual violence that was not found in the UNESCO guidelines. This content was related to myths and prejudices about sexual assault, feelings that may arise following a situation of sexual assault, and ensuring personal safety in different contexts.

***UNESCO: "Safe use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)"***

While Québec's learning content mentions portrayals of sexuality in the media, including on the internet and on social media, UNESCO recommends specific content on safe use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) which the *Sexuality Education* program does not discuss. Québec's program does not contain information on how Internet and social media use may be beneficial while also requiring special care or consideration, can be sources of unwanted sexual attention, can result in unrealistic expectations about sexual behaviour, sexual response and body appearance, and can result in potential moral, ethical and legal situations that require careful navigation.

***Comprehensive View of Sexuality***

**UNESCO: "Sex, Sexuality and the Sexual Life Cycle"**

The aim of Québec's "Comprehensive View of Sexuality" theme is for students to learn to become aware of the different dimensions of sexuality. UNESCO's guidelines overlap with a portion of Québec's content in this section regarding sexuality being experienced and expressed through five dimensions. Québec states these dimensions as biological, psycho-affective, socio-cultural, interpersonal and moral, while UNESCO lists six domains: biological, social, psychological, spiritual, ethical and cultural. While some of these domains may be seen as

interchangeable, the spiritual domain is one which seems to be most lacking from Québec's program, according to technical guidelines.

### ***Sexual behaviour***

#### **UNESCO: "Sexual Behaviour and Sexual Response"**

The aim of Québec's "Sexual behaviour" theme is for students to learn to make decisions that foster positive, consensual and safe sexual experiences. Québec's *Sexuality Education* program abides by UNESCO's recommendations of: learning to say no and seek support when there is unwelcome physical contact; acknowledging that people can show love for others through touching and intimacy; differentiating myths from facts about sexual behaviour; informed decision-making concerning sexual behaviour, including minimizing or avoiding risks; and recognizing that engaging in sexual behaviour should feel pleasurable and comes with associated responsibilities for one's health and wellbeing. The *Sexuality Education* program also includes content on the sequence of sexual behaviours from kissing and touching to genital sexual relations, which UNESCO does not cover. UNESCO recommends additional detailed content on the topic of sexual behaviour, including the decision to delay sex, and the potential risks of transactional sexual activity.

### ***Sexually transmissible and blood-borne infections (STBBIs) and pregnancy***

#### **UNESCO: "Sexual and Reproductive Health"**

#### ***UNESCO: "Pregnancy and Pregnancy Prevention"***

The aim of Québec's "Pregnancy and birth" theme is for students to learn to understand conception, pregnancy and birth. The *Sexuality Education* program does not include content recommended by UNESCO pertaining to: recognizing that gender roles and peer norms may influence decisions about contraception; acknowledging the practices which can contribute to or

threaten a healthy pregnancy; and, understanding that people who are sexually active should be able to access reproductive health services for contraception or unintended pregnancies without significant barriers, regardless of ability, marital status, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation. Québec follows UNESCO's recommendations of discussing how different protection methods work and their effectiveness, and encouraging learners to adopt a positive attitude towards condoms and contraception, while teaching the advantages of using them and their importance.

***UNESCO: "HIV and AIDS Stigma, Care, Treatment and Support"***

The *Sexuality Education* program does not mention HIV or AIDS. UNESCO recommends learning content on the topic of HIV and AIDS stigma, care, treatment and support, spanning from: recognizing that people living with HIV have equal rights; understanding that there are effective medical treatments that can help people with HIV; explaining how HIV and AIDS can affect family structure, family roles and responsibilities; and understanding that with the right care, respect and support, people living with HIV can lead fully productive lives across the lifespan.

***UNESCO: "Understanding, Recognizing and Reducing the Risk of STIs, including HIV"***

The aim of Québec's "STBBIs and pregnancy" theme is for students to learn to take responsibility for their sexual and reproductive health. The *Sexuality Education* program does include learning content regarding STBBIs which overlaps with UNESCO's content (labeled STIs in the technical guidance document). The Québec learning topics which follow international guidelines include: describing the ways people can reduce their vulnerability to STIs; understanding modes of transmission and the correct use of condoms; and, identifying

strategies which favour safe sexual behaviours based on factors that influence one's own ability to protect oneself and make a decision.

Québec also includes content which UNESCO's guidelines do not consider, including: reflecting on ethical issues related to STBBIs and pregnancy such as using protection, notifying an exposed partner, and completing treatment; understanding methods of protection other than condoms, such as hormonal contraception and emergency contraception; identifying specific obstacles to making decisions about safe sexual behaviours such as unfavourable attitudes of peers, partner or family toward sexual relations and safe behaviours, consumption of alcohol or other drugs, belief that the partner is not infected or is infertile, or that the pill protects against STBBIs; identifying the steps to take after unprotected or poorly protected sexual relations; and, the frequency and timing of consulting a health professional for testing.

The learning content recommended by UNESCO which the *Sexuality Education* program fails to cover includes general information about the immune system and health and understanding that you can have an illness and look healthy. It also includes specific information about voluntary medical male circumcision (VMMC) and Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) in combination with condoms, and Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) in the context of reducing the risk of acquiring or transmitting HIV. Similarly, UNESCO guidance explicitly names the most common STIs (HIV, HPV, herpes, chlamydia and gonorrhea) whereas Québec's program discusses STBBIs as an umbrella term. UNESCO lists gender roles as a potential influence on a person's decision about which strategy to use to reduce vulnerability to STIs, which may overlap with the "norms" Québec's program alludes to.

*Other notable topics***UNESCO: “Values, Rights, Culture and Sexuality”**

UNESCO suggests an emphasis on values, human rights, and culture as they pertain to sexuality, however Québec lacks specific content in these domains. For instance, UNESCO recommends content discussing what values are, what human rights are and the policies which protect them, or the fact that human rights impact sexual and reproductive health. Québec also does not specify that social, cultural and religious factors influence what is considered acceptable and unacceptable sexual behaviour in society, and that these factors evolve over time.

**UNESCO: “Skills for Health and Well-being”*****UNESCO: “Norms and Peer Influence on Sexual Behaviour”***

Although Québec's program contains content regarding peer pressure, it does not include content recommended by UNESCO describing how norms and peer influence can be positive or negative, or on possible strategies for exercising assertiveness and challenging negative peer influence.

***UNESCO: “Decision-making”***

The *Sexuality Education* program mentions the fact that throughout adolescence, learners will have to make more informed decisions, however UNESCO recommends more detailed learning content focused on decision-making. For instance, the Québec program covers that learners should be able to make decisions, assert yourself and articulate your needs and wishes. The UNESCO program discusses ideas which are missing in Québec's program, such as: decision-making as a skill that can be learned and practices, the process of making decisions about sexual behaviour includes consideration of all positive and negative potential

consequences, factors which can make it difficult to make rational decisions about sexual behaviour, and the fact that sexual decision-making can result in possible legal consequences.

***UNESCO: “Communication, Refusal and Negotiation Skills”***

Québec does not discuss the importance of communication in all relationships, including between parents/guardians, trusted adults and children, or among friends and others, as is recommended in UNESCO's technical guidance. UNESCO also recommends that a comprehensive sexual education program should have content about: how gender roles can affect communication between people; how good communication is essential to positive relationships; and that effective communication is key to expressing personal needs and sexual limits. Québec's program mentions that healthy conflict management in a romantic relationship is important.

***UNESCO: “Media Literacy and Sexuality”***

UNESCO recommends detailed content on media literacy and sexuality which the *Sexuality Education* program mentions briefly as part of other learning content. This recommended content includes the idea that: different forms of media can present information which may be correct or incorrect; media can positively or negatively influence values, attitudes, and norms about sexuality and gender; some media portray unrealistic images about sexuality and sexual relationships; and that negative and inaccurate media portrayals of men and women can be challenged to promote gender equality.

***UNESCO: “Finding Help and Support”***

UNESCO emphasizes detailed learning content on the topic of finding help and support in friends, family, teachers, religious leaders and community members. Québec's *Sexuality Education* program does not emphasize this content in a separate section, however it does

mention finding support in the context of sexual assault, strategies for finding information on sexuality, and support for challenges in first dating relationships. UNESCO suggests greater depth and specificity in identifying different sources of help and support, recognizing which issues need to be reported to a trusted source of help, assessing the reliability and trustworthiness of sources of help, and identifying where to access relevant services or assistance.

Table 4.2. UNESCO's recommendations for CSE content development

Focus on clear goals, outcomes, and key learnings to determine the content, approach and activities.	!
Cover topics in a logical sequence.	✓
Design context-oriented activities which promote critical thinking.	X
Address consent and life skills.	!
Provide scientifically accurate information about HIV and AIDS and other STIs, pregnancy prevention, early and unintended pregnancy and the effectiveness and availability of different methods of protection.	!
Address how biological experiences, gender and cultural norms affect the way children and young people experience and navigate their sexuality and their SRH in general.	!
Address specific risk and protective factors that affect particular sexual behaviours.	✓
Address how to manage specific situations that might lead to HIV infection, other STIs, unwanted or unprotected sexual intercourse or violence.	!
Address individual attitudes and peer norms concerning condoms and the full range of contraceptives.	✓
Provide information about what services are available to address the health needs of children and young people, especially their SRH needs.	X

Legend:

- X : Most or all the recommended content is absent
- ! : Some of the content is included but detail is lacking
- ✓ : Most or all the recommended content is included



An analysis comparing UNESCO's recommendations for content development also confirms that the *Sexuality Education* program abides by some content guidelines, but not others (summary found in Table 4.2). For instance, although Québec outlines a vision of sexuality and sexual education, the program lacks clarity and detail in their goals and desired outcomes for learning content. Content such as consent and life skills, as well as HIV and AIDS, early and unintended pregnancy, and information about services is lacking or non-existent. Furthermore, the program does not suggest context-oriented activities which promote critical thinking. Topics including risk and protective factors for particular sexual behaviours, and attitudes and norms concerning contraceptives are discussed in Québec's program, as is recommended by UNESCO. Five out of ten of UNESCO's recommendations for content development were not met with sufficient detail.

### **Summary of Findings**

A framework analysis comparing the learning content of Québec's *Sexuality Education* program to recommendations found in UNESCO's *International technical guidance on sexuality education* revealed discrepancies among most of its content areas. Overall, Québec's program touches upon many key concepts recommended by UNESCO, but 6 out of 8 themes (75%) were found to lack overall depth and specificity within a majority of the learning themes. The themes of sexual growth and body image and sexual assault/sexual violence lack the most detail, followed by the themes of pregnancy and birth, gender identity, stereotypes and roles, emotional and romantic life, and STBBIs and pregnancy. Themes and content specifically related to values, human rights, culture is lacking nearly entirely, as well as content focused on building skills such as decision-making, communication and media literacy, and finding support and services. The theme regarding a comprehensive view of sexuality and sexual behaviour followed UNESCO's

recommendations nearly completely. Summaries of the study's main findings can be found in Table 4.1 and Table 4.2. The following chapter will contain a discussion of the implications of the main findings grounded by an Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis, and provide recommendations to administrators, researchers, and policymakers.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The aim of the present study was to explore how well the content of Québec's *Sexuality Education* program follows established best practices and guidelines, using a framework analysis method. In this chapter, I synthesize the main findings of the study and present potential interpretations and implications of the results, grounded in an Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis (IBPA) theoretical approach. The end of the chapter includes a balanced discussion of the scope, strengths and limitations of the study, followed by recommendations for researchers, administrators, and policymakers.

The framework analysis of Québec's *Sexuality Education* program found that the provincial program provides a balance of positive aspects of sexuality and relationships as well as the prevention of negative health outcomes, as is recommended by national and international guidance (SIECCAN, 2019; UNESCO, 2018). The results also demonstrate that, although most recommended topics are mentioned, sufficient detail is lacking from the *Sexuality Education* program. Foundational content such as clear goals, outcomes, and key learnings necessary for an effective comprehensive sexuality education program are notably absent.

The themes which omitted the most detailed content included: sexual growth and body image; sexual assault/sexual violence; values, rights, culture and sexuality; and skills for health and well-being. Content areas in which topics were lacking recommended detail included: pregnancy and birth; identity, gender stereotypes and roles, and social norms; emotional and romantic life; and sexually transmissible and blood-borne infections (STBBIs) and pregnancy. The only themes which met or exceeded UNESCO's recommendations are comprehensive view of sexuality, and sexual behaviour. It may be the case that some of the content recommended by UNESCO which the Québec MEES was deemed contextually irrelevant, such as child, early and

forced marriages, or the necessity of access to clean water during menstruation; however, this accounts for a select few of the discrepancies noted in the Results chapter.

### **Implications of Findings**

Using Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis (IBPA) enables researchers to examine different dimensions of policy contexts, including history, politics, lived experiences and diverse knowledges. This can be especially useful when interpreting findings based on UNESCO guidelines, which are meant to be adapted for the context in which they are applied.

Across the themes of Québec's program, certain patterns can be observed, particularly in specific learning content which was omitted. SIECCAN, much like UNESCO, recommends that CSE programs should integrate a critical awareness of social-environmental factors that may enhance or prevent the achievement of sexual health and well-being (2019). A substantial portion of UNESCO's learning content which was omitted by Québec revolved around inequalities on factors such as social, economic or health status, ethnicity, race, origin, sexual orientation, or ability. Québec's program does not demonstrate how inequalities and differences in power due to these factors can negatively affect a person's health, relationships, or access to services. SIECCAN reinforces the importance of this lens, emphasizing that a core principle of CSE includes accessible content inclusive of age, race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, STI status, geographic location, socio-economic status, cultural or religious background, ability or housing status.

Neglecting to teach students that inequalities exist in this capacity may perpetuate the false notion that people living in Québec do not experience exclusion or marginalization based on these factors. It may also be more difficult for students to recognize how stereotypes and norms can lead to harmful outcomes. For instance, the *Sexuality Education* does not mention

gender-based violence, nor does it draw a connection between gender stereotypes, peer norms and inequality. This may lead students to believe that gender stereotypes are inaccurate, but not necessarily harmful on a social-environmental scale or to the extent of violating human rights. The Québec program does not mention disability in its learning content, despite MEES acknowledging the relevance of discussions of sexuality and disability in a separate document for parents of children with disabilities (MEES, 2020b). This may convey to stakeholders that while students with disabilities should learn about sexuality, students without disabilities should not necessarily learn about inclusion or diversity.

Another particularly surprising omission in the *Sexuality Education* program is the lack of content regarding safe use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The only mention of social media and other interactive technologies asks students to “analyze different representations of sexuality in the public space.” While this analysis is certainly important, it lacks the depth of content required of a CSE program considering the relevance of ICTs among youth today. It is possible that the various stakeholders involved in the Québec program do not wish to “give children ideas” in being more explicit about content such as exchanging sexual media. However, a thorough discussion of the moral, ethical and legal situations that may arise in using these technologies in a sexual context is strongly recommended by national and international guidance (SIECCAN, 2019; UNESCO, 2018).

Of particular concern is the absence of detailed content in the domain of “skills for health and well-being.” In particular, the emphasis on skills related to decision-making, communication, media literacy, and finding help and support found in the guidance is notably omitted within Québec’s program. This directly maps onto UNESCO’s recommendation for CSE curricula to address consent and life skills. Although Québec outlines an aim for students to learn

to make decisions that foster positive, consensual and safe sexual experiences, its shortcomings on teachable skills in the domains of decision-making, negotiation, media literacy, and accessing resources have serious implications for youth, which arguably inhibit learners from achieving this aim. In neglecting to teach students particular skills to make their own informed decisions and communicate effectively, this may disempower them and convey the message that they cannot be trusted to act responsibly or advocate for themselves and others.

### **Practical Applications of the Present Study**

School boards and private schools are responsible for training and supporting school staff in the delivery of the *Sexuality Education* program. The Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur (MEES) has made training and support tools available such as access to resource people specialized in sexology or pedagogy, learning sessions those tasked with training in school boards and private schools, pedagogical frameworks, a telecollaboration platform, and an allocation of funds to support schools in training teachers. Although UNESCO recommends context-oriented activities to encourage critical thinking, Québec's MEES does not offer public English-language documents detailing activities for the program at the time of writing. A MEES report from the program's pilot project has stated that, although pilot teachers asked for increased support from the ministry, providing specific lesson plans or activities is not the responsibility of the MEES (Jetté & Zouaghi, 2017). Passing the responsibility to create materials on to the school administration, teachers or educators may be feasible if adequate support and training was given, although it is currently unclear whether the needs of Québec schools are being met in this regard. According to the December 2020 version of the MEES website, no updates have been published on their website regarding training sessions for the

2019-2020 or 2020-2021 school years, or on any tools related to online learning and the COVID-19 pandemic (MEES, 2020a).

The finding that the *Sexuality Education* program lacks detail and specificity overall is especially concerning because it is unclear whether teachers have been adequately trained to deliver material related to sex, gender or sexuality. Although teachers are not mandated to teach the material, school administrators may be incentivized not to hire external specialists such as sexologists at the risk of exceeding the capacity of their budget. Asking teachers with inadequate training to take responsibility for delivering the *Sexuality Education* program has the potential to result in teaching methods that are not evidence-based, the spread of misinformation, or transference of personal values, especially if the teachers need to fill in the gaps where detail is lacking.

Overall, it is also unclear whether the *Sexuality Education* program is being implemented as planned. Currently, sections 461 and 85 of the Québec Education Act refer to “activities or content” to be integrated into the broad areas of learning (“Education Act,” 2020). This suggests that, while the *Sexuality Education* content is now mandatory, the program must compete with content from other areas of learning in order to get an adequate allotment of instructional time (Action Canada 2020). Although content delivery is mandated at 5-15 hours per school year, the MEES website does not contain information on how they intend to enforce this mandate.

Furthermore, it is uncertain if there are explicit plans for program evaluation and a process for revision or improvement, especially if there are no explicit program goals or measurable desired outcomes. Issues of policy development, content, implementation, and evaluation invariably affect the youth for whom the program is intended, and especially those at the margins and intersections of various lived experiences (i.e. youth with disabilities, youth who

are incarcerated, racialized youth, Indigenous youth, and youth with diverse genders and sexualities).

### **Scope, Strengths and Limitations of the Present Study**

The study's scope, strengths and limitations will be presented in the following section. Although this study is not intended to be generalizable to any other program or curriculum, the methodology and methods may be applied to other provincial sex education curricula for analysis and evaluation. This offers a contribution to existing research on the Canadian landscape of sexuality education programs, and offers a methodological approach for assessing how well curricula follow established guidelines. The study's theoretical framework, methodology, method of data collection and method of data analysis were designed in alignment with one another. Content analysis was chosen as the method of data analysis because it offers the opportunity for a constructivist approach. Furthermore, framework analysis was used as a specific method of content analysis due to its flexibility in being both inductive and deductive.

An inductive approach to the content analysis was important to ground the research in an intersectionality-based policy analysis (IBPA) framework, which allowed for themes to emerge from the data. The IBPA framework also allowed and encouraged reflection on my positionality as a researcher in this project. This allowed me to examine and present my own subjectivities in the Introduction in order to maintain transparency and rigour within the research.

The UNESCO guidelines offered a basis for a more deductive approach within the same framework, and these were reflected in the main findings and discussion of the thesis. UNESCO guidelines were specifically chosen as a basis of comparison for the framework analysis for their evidence-based approach, their clarity and their flexibility.



The present study also had limitations in the materials used for data collection and analysis which may have impacted the findings. The official MEES *Sexuality Education* documents used were limited to English-language documents. There are other French-language documents pertaining to the program available, and it is speculated that these documents may contain more information regarding the program. This also highlights a concern regarding the accessibility of the program in English-language schools in Québec.

The UNESCO recommendations are also not without criticism. Although both are evidence-based, there are certain elements mentioned in SIECCAN's guidelines which were lacking in the UNESCO guidance. Colonialism and indigeneity are not mentioned, which SIECCAN highlights as an important facet of sexuality education, due to the intergenerational impacts of colonialism on the sexual health and well-being of Indigenous people (SIECCAN, 2019). Scholars have also criticized a lack of discourses of pleasure and desire within sex education curricula more generally (Allen, 2004; Cameron-Lewis & Allen, 2013). UNESCO mentions pleasure, desire and fantasy, but it does not elaborate deeply on these aspects of sexuality. UNESCO also only mentions sexual orientation in the context of harassment and bullying, which may be biased towards a narrative of hardship. The international guidelines also do not explicitly mention race, which is important as illustrated by anti-racism scholars (Whitten & Sethna, 2014; Wooten, 2017). Finally, UNESCO uses bioessentialist language which can be exclusionary to people who are transgender and gender non-conforming (i.e. using "women and men" instead of "people with vaginas and people with penises").

## **Recommendations**

### ***For Administrators and Policymakers***

The findings and implications in this study have given rise to recommendations for administrators and policymakers. Firstly, it is recommended that the current *Sexuality Education* program be altered to incorporate more specificity and depth in its learning content. In addition, goals of the program could be made explicit, and later used towards program evaluation efforts. It is also recommended that content focusing on skills for health and well-being is added, including material on communication, decision-making, media literacy, and finding help and support. Scheduled revisions and updates to the program can be implemented in order to keep content relevant and maintain a framework for feedback and adjustment. For purposes of accessibility, it is also recommended that English documents of any existing French program documents be made available, to accommodate predominantly English-language schools in the province.

### ***For Researchers***

Because the *Sexuality Education* was framed within a critical policy analysis approach, the content analysis conducted in this thesis could be framed as a first step to an analysis of the program's development, implementation, and evaluation. More research is necessary to assess the needs of support staff, administrators, school boards, and other stakeholders; interviews or focus groups may be conducted in addition to surveys to generate a robust mixed-methods needs assessment. A critical policy analysis of the *Sexuality Education* program, including program development, implementation and evaluation would provide further insight into the efficacy of the current curriculum and its supports.

In addition, although the *Sexuality Education* program is meant to address the sexuality education needs of Québec students, little research has been conducted regarding their learning needs, and the pedagogical methods they would most benefit from. In general, research indicates that many youth seldom feel their learning needs are being met regarding sex education (Gowen & Wings-Yanez, 2014; MacDonald et al., 2011). In order to attend to the needs of youth in Québec high schools, researchers and policy makers must first shift the narrative from the needs of “rhetorical children” (Jones, 2011) to actual children by attending to their unique voices and perspectives on the topic of an effective sexuality education program.

### **Conclusion**

The content analysis in this study, grounded in Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis framework, provides insight into the ways in which Québec's *Sexuality Education* program can be altered to abide by UNESCO's recommendations for a more equitable and rights-based approach to CSE. Findings demonstrate a need for more detailed and intersectional program content, particularly within the theme of skill development such as communication, decision-making, media literacy, and finding help and support in the community. As educators, administrators, policymakers and researchers adjust to the implementation of the new *Sexuality Education* program, it is my hope that youth in Québec can continue to learn and think critically about sexuality in all its dimensions, and its implications.

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## Appendix A: Sexuality Education Summary Table for Kindergarten and Elementary

Kindergarten	Elementary					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Sexual Growth and Body Image</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Parts of the body</li> <li>› Expressing needs and feelings</li> </ul>	<b>Comprehensive View of Sexuality</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Aspects of sexuality (body, heart, mind)</li> </ul>	<b>Sexual Growth and Body Image</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Sexual organs</li> <li>› Appreciating your body and personal hygiene</li> </ul>	<b>Comprehensive View of Sexuality</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Aspects of sexuality (body, heart, mind and messages conveyed by the social environment)</li> </ul>	<b>Sexual Growth and Body Image</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Main changes associated with puberty</li> <li>› Feelings about growing up</li> </ul>	<b>Sexual Growth and Body Image</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Physical and psychological changes associated with puberty</li> <li>› Role of puberty in growth</li> </ul>	<b>Comprehensive View of Sexuality</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Dimensions of sexuality (biological, psychoaffective, socio-cultural, interpersonal and moral)</li> </ul>
<b>Pregnancy and Birth</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Steps in making a baby</li> <li>› Welcoming a new baby</li> </ul>	<b>Identity, Gender Stereotypes and Roles, and Social Norms</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Gender roles and stereotypes</li> <li>› Respect for differences</li> </ul>	<b>Emotional and Romantic Life</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Interpersonal relationships</li> <li>› Expressing feelings</li> </ul>	<b>Identity, Gender Stereotypes and Roles, and Social Norms</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Stereotypes in social environments and in the media</li> <li>› Influence of stereotypes</li> </ul>	<b>Identity, Gender Stereotypes and Roles, and Social Norms</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Establishing egalitarian relationships</li> </ul>	<b>Sexual Assault</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Preventing and dealing with sexual assault in a real or virtual context</li> </ul>	<b>Sexual Growth and Body Image</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Understanding the changes associated with puberty</li> <li>› Body image</li> </ul>
	<b>Sexual Assault</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› How to recognize a situation of sexual assault</li> <li>› Reporting an incident to an adult</li> </ul>	<b>Pregnancy and Birth</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› The egg and the sperm</li> <li>› Development of a fetus</li> </ul>	<b>Sexual Assault</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› How to recognize different forms of sexual assault</li> <li>› Preventing and dealing with sexual assault</li> </ul>	<b>Emotional and Romantic Life</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Representations of love and friendship</li> <li>› Attitudes and behaviours in interpersonal relationships</li> </ul>		<b>Identity, Gender Stereotypes and Roles, and Social Norms</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Impacts of sexism, homophobia and transphobia</li> <li>› Respect for sexual diversity and respect for rights</li> </ul>
						<b>Emotional and Romantic Life</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Romantic and sexual awakening during puberty</li> </ul>

## Appendix B: Sexuality Education Summary Table for Secondary

Secondary				
I	II	III	IV	V
<b>Comprehensive View of Sexuality</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Entering adolescence</li> </ul>	<b>Emotional and Romantic Life</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Romantic relationships</li> <li>› Challenges involved in first dating relationships</li> </ul>	<b>Identity, Gender Stereotypes and Roles, and Social Norms</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Reflect in critical manner on representations of sexuality in the public space</li> </ul>	<b>Emotional and Romantic Life</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Recognizing symptoms of violence</li> <li>› Solutions to prevent or deal with violence</li> </ul>	<b>Comprehensive View of Sexuality</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Being comfortable with one's sexuality all one's life</li> </ul>
<b>Sexual Growth and Body Image</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Advantages of having a positive body image</li> <li>› Influence that social norms can have on body image</li> </ul>	<b>Sexual Violence</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Myths and prejudices about sexual assault</li> <li>› Concept of consent</li> </ul>	<b>Emotional and Romantic Life</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Benefits of a romantic relationship based on mutuality</li> <li>› Managing conflicts in a healthy way in a romantic relationship</li> </ul>	<b>Sexual Behaviour</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Issues related to sexual relations in adolescence</li> <li>› Sustaining emotional intimacy and sexual intimacy</li> </ul>	<b>Emotional and Romantic Life</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Meaningful emotional and romantic relationships</li> </ul>
<b>Identity, Gender Stereotypes and Roles, and Social Norms</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Role of puberty in consolidating one's identity</li> </ul>	<b>Sexual Behaviour</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Sexual behaviour during adolescence</li> <li>› Respect for choices concerning sexual behaviour</li> <li>›</li> </ul>	<b>Sexual Violence</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Active role to prevent or report sexual assault</li> <li>› Helpful attitudes toward victims of sexual assault</li> </ul>	<b>STBBIs and Pregnancy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Steps to take after unprotected or poorly protected sexual relations</li> <li>› Development of safe sexual behaviours</li> </ul>	<b>STBBIs and Pregnancy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Risks of STBBIs and pregnancy associated with different contexts of a sexually active lifestyle</li> <li>› Ethical issues</li> </ul>
<b>Emotional and Romantic Life</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Feelings of love and attraction</li> <li>› Awareness of sexual orientation</li> </ul>	<b>STBBIs and Pregnancy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Importance of sexual and reproductive health</li> <li>› Positive attitude toward using protection</li> </ul>	<b>Sexual Behaviour</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Desire and pleasure in sexual activity</li> <li>› Factors that influence sexual relationships</li> </ul>		
		<b>STBBIs and Pregnancy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› How protection methods work</li> <li>› Development of safe sexual behaviours</li> </ul>		



## Appendix C: Detailed content in Sexuality Education

### Sexual Assault and Sexual Violence

Secondary II (13–14 years old)	Secondary III (14–15 years old)
<p><b>Reflect on the impact of myths and prejudices about sexual assault</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Myths and prejudices: about the person who is a victim or a perpetrator, girls, boys, the context of sexual assault (e.g. drugs, alcohol), consent</li> <li>› Impact of myths and prejudices: diminished ability to recognize a situation of sexual assault, attribution of blame (shame, guilt and confusion felt by people who are victims), obstacles to reaching out for social support (difficulty of reporting the assault), isolation</li> </ul> <p><b>Understand your own position on the notion of consent and its application in order to recognize a situation of sexual assault</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Notion of consent: age difference, reasons for accepting or refusing a sexual behaviour, validity of consent and situations in which consent is not possible, real or perceived sexual pressure, in the virtual world</li> <li>› Contexts: situations (e.g. isolation, drug or alcohol consumption, relationship of authority that makes refusal difficult, fear of upsetting the person), rights</li> </ul>	<p><b>Become aware of the active role you can play in preventing or reporting a situation of sexual assault</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Situations requiring the use of self-protection skills: with a friend, an acquaintance, a romantic partner or ex-partner, a stranger in the real or virtual world</li> <li>› Factors of vulnerability in each situation</li> </ul> <p><b>Understand the experience of people who are victims of sexual assault in order to react appropriately if a friend confides in you</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Helpful attitudes: listening, empathy, non-judgmental attitude, believing the person, confidentiality, not insisting on hearing details of the assault, referral to a person who may be able to help (person at school or an organization)</li> <li>› Resources that can help: at school, in the community</li> </ul>

#### Among 12- to 17-year-olds:

57% of sexual assaults are perpetrated by an acquaintance, a friend or an ex-partner.<sup>136</sup> The age of the presumed perpetrators indicates that many of them are peers since 39% were between 12 and 17 years old.<sup>137</sup>

The Internet is an integral part of their social life:<sup>138</sup> they spend a lot of time on social media<sup>139</sup> where they are supervised less<sup>140</sup> than they were in their childhood. Although this is not the most frequent form of sexual assault in early adolescence, young people 12 to 17 years old are overrepresented among victims of online luring (82%, of which 46% are between the ages of 12 and 14 and 36% are between the ages of 15 and 17).<sup>141</sup>

#### At this age, prevention of sexual assault should consist of:

- › repeating prevention messages,<sup>142</sup> reinforcing the self-protection skills taught in elementary school and examining the notion of consent and the nuances associated with it<sup>143</sup> so as to be able to protect themselves in risk situations common in adolescence.
- › reducing the number of new cases of sexual violence by targeting young people with problematic behaviours as well as potential victims.<sup>144</sup>

#### Young people between the ages of 15 and 17:

They represent 15% of all victims of sexual assault under 18 years of age in Québec.<sup>145</sup> Among girls, 6.4% of 13-year-olds and 10.9% of 16-year-olds have experienced at least one episode of sexual violence<sup>146</sup> committed by their romantic partner.

As well as continuing to be vulnerable to sexual assault, young people are at risk of experiencing violence in a romantic context.<sup>147</sup> (See the content for Secondary IV under the theme "Emotional and Romantic Life.")

#### Why do students need to learn this?

##### Certain factors related to the psychosexual development of young people make adolescents vulnerable to sexual violence, including:

- curiosity about sexuality, desire for love, closeness,<sup>131</sup> romance and romantic relationships,<sup>132</sup> desire for acceptance,<sup>133</sup> feeling of independence.<sup>134</sup> All these can cause some young people to ignore safety rules, especially in the presence of their friends,<sup>135</sup> whether in the real or virtual world.