

Part II

Sexualities Education in Schools

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Introduction: Sexualities in Schools/Pub(lic) Dis'plays

We have been raised to fear the yes within ourselves, our deepest cravings.
——Audre Lorde (1993, p. 342)

You never reach the Body-without-Organs, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit. ... But you're already on it, scurrying like a vermin, groping like a blind person, or running like a lunatic; desert traveler and nomad of the steppes. On it we sleep, live our waking lives, fight—fight and are fought—seek our place, experience untold happiness and fabulous defeats; on it we penetrate and are penetrated; on it we love. ——Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 150)

Somewhere between Audre Lorde's cravings and Deleuze and Guattari's evacuated and distributed bundles of skin and organs, this section seeks to open a space to interrogate the pedagogies and politics of sexuality education within schools: a space fraught with desire and constraint, excess and containment, denial and yearning.

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To begin our journey, we open with a provocation: asking that readers release bodies, sexualities, and schools from the conceptual boxes in which they have been contained and re-imagine all three as hinged assemblages. Fluids and fantasies, words and images, relationships and tweets, circulating within and beyond classrooms, where organs, desires, silences, naughty giggles, racial and gender formations intersect. By (dis)assembling and hinging, we begin to understand the lively jazz of what is taught, learned, witnessed, affectively charged, embodied, enacted, muted, and resisted by students and educators. Across the chapters included in this section, we enter those spaces we call schools, around the topics we call sexualities, to peek beneath the sheets to learn about how secrets are formed, shame is built piece by piece, subjectivities are cobbled and re-assembled, and how transgressions are planned and carried out.

Despite rumors and moral panics to the contrary, sex ed is not, nor has it ever been, confined to a teacher standing in front of a room of students, talking about sex.

The chapters in this section pierce the cellophane of cultural anxieties about young sexualities, always gendered and racialized, always imagined as desiring and dangerous, (dis)abled and excessive (McClelland and Fine 2008a, b). On the naughty/innocent axis, many of the authors help us see how young children are engaging always, already, and riskily with/in their bodies even as adults insist on their innocence; how black girls and women are taking up, resisting, and queering the tropes that are layered onto their cultural forms; how immigrant and undocumented young people refuse the yardsticks of who deserves citizenship, belonging, who measures up; and we accompany activist social movements as they press with intensity at the borders of bodies, media, and schools, even as governmentality stitches together the lips of educators, conscripting what can and cannot be taught.

With a wide swath of writers and topics, situated in a sexuality food court of pedagogical spaces, we intentionally stretch the conception of where public education takes place, in schools, of course, but also prisons, preschools, in social media, and at home. We invited scholars from around the globe who would shed light on not only what was happening “inside schools,” but who would focus on varied ages, multiple sexualities, and complexly racialized bodies to interrogate how sexuality circulates through schools in official and unspoken, affective and curricular circuits.

Most importantly, we engaged with scholars who would provoke insights from bodies and transgressions, rather than rehearse what is normative, silenced, and negotiated in compulsive tropes about adolescent sexualities. We intend these chapters to be imagined as a set of provocations, an experience that helps one *imagine more* (Dewey 1934) and avoid the anesthetic or deadening experience which drains the reader of imagination and hope for what could be.

Sexuality education occurs officially and predominantly in school-based settings where students and educators are subjected to the whims of State, ideology, testing, and local moral panics, mediated by sexuality education's discourses and practices of "child," "gendered," "(hetero)sexual," "normal," "healthy," and "citizen." These chapters stretch to render visible the membranes where parents, administrators, social movements, governments, and expert commentators sculpt school-based sexuality education.

In this section, we aimed to push on the idea of what school settings could invite—to encourage the praxis of teaching and produce a set of curricula that could push on the boundaries of sex education in schools. We asked each chapter author to theorize and also include a "lesson plan" for a sexuality education curriculum. Both on their own and in collective form, these curricula stretch the sexual imaginary for what might/could happen within educational spaces.

While some have argued that schools are too closed off, irrelevant, colonized by moral panics and overtaken by the speed and accessibility of the Internet, too regulated, and too confining, we want to press nevertheless for the centrality and sensuality of schools in the work of public education of community life. Schools, and public schools in particular, are exactly where we must imagine what should be taught to everyone. In a time of State shrinkage and neoliberalism, public schools (and the few remaining public libraries) remain critical and deeply political spaces where all are [presumably] welcome. Schools survive as one of the only places where theorists, advocates, educators, critics, scholars, parents, and taxpayers must contend with existential and material questions, "What do we think everyone needs to learn about sex and sexualities? What is in the service of the public good? What can/must be said, and what will be silenced? And then where do desire and que(e)ries go when censorship prevails and pedagogical spaces are sealed off?"

In the spirit of assemblage, there are many ways to organize the chapters, but we offer three analytics for thinking about sexuality education and the chapters included in this section:

Refusing Innocence

Kerry H. Robinson and Cristyn Davies in Chap. 10 trace the deep ideological investments in childhood innocence and instead challenge us to consider the many ways that children are actively engaged in constructing themselves as gendered and sexual subjects from early ages.

Karin A. Martin and Lacey Bobier in Chap. 11 explore the ways that US preschools structure informal everyday interactions and they develop a

thoughtful critique of the “danger-only” approaches that inform contemporary approaches to childhood sexuality.

Desire in the Folds of Injustice

Jennifer C. Nash in Chap. 12 takes us to the expansive public spaces of popular culture and teaches us not only to be better (and more complicated) readers of popular culture, but to critically expand our sense of black sexual possibilities and black sexual freedoms by refusing the binary of “good” and “bad” representations of black female bodies.

Jessica Fields and Signy Toquinto in Chap. 13 take us to jails and prisons and show us the many ways that sexuality educators have an important role to play in addressing the profound injustices marking imprisoned people’s lives, and to notice the wisdom and resources in the women behind, and then leaving, the bar.

Marisa Ragonese, Christin Bowman, and Deborah L. Tolman in Chap. 14 move us to the virtual classroom provided by social media and illustrate the possibilities of inter-generational feminist activism centered around critical readings of contemporary visual culture.

Leigh Patel and Lauren P. Saenz in Chap. 15 move us to pedagogical, curricular, and assessment practices inside schools that shape and narrow how definitions of “legitimate” are constructed so that they never fit the bodies of undocumented youth and, indeed, render this construction process invisible.

Daring to Teach the (Un)sayable

Laina Bay Cheng in Chap. 16 argues that US school-based sexuality education, confined by neoliberal “best practices,” fuels the rhetoric of sexual risk for students. As a result, the opportunity to engage youth in critical analysis of the interplay between sexual well-being and social conditions is too often overlooked, but holds enormous promise.

Annette Brömdal, Mary Lou Rasmussen, Fida Sanjakdar, Louisa Allen, and Kathleen Quinlivan in Chap. 17 focus on the pedagogical potential of conversations about intersex issues as a way to explore the potential of breaking binaries, learning about “embarrassing bodies,” and how power accrues in some bodies and not others. Kathleen Quinlivan traces the power of neoliberal racialized and sexualized rhetorics in Australian and New Zealand schools

and in particular the effects of these discourses on herself as a researcher as well as the Māori and Pasifika students in these schools.

These chapters together provoke and set up three challenges for us all to address. First, they challenge us to refuse the trappings of innocence, and they remind us that innocence and protection are always a trap. Second, they urge us to remember that desire lives in the folds of injustice, and dances in the subaltern crevices of oppression, even when that desire may be difficult to see. Third, they insist that we never stop teaching the unsayable, for it is that which cannot be said that must be said (or you may as well stop teaching all together). Our joy has been bringing these voices together to form a chorus that can sing a jazz of the forbidden, strange, and delicious from the rooftops.

References

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