
Making pupils the resources and promoting gender equality in HIV/AIDS education

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Abstract

Educational resources are usually understood as material things with monetary values, but, as I propose in this paper, with a particular focus on HIV/AIDS and sex education, they should also be conceptualised as the lives and identities of pupils. How teachers can tap into the rich potential of pupils by developing appropriate teaching materials and pedagogies is a major theme addressed in this paper which draws on a recent UNICEF-funded study with mainly black African teenage children as a model of good pedagogic practice and as a source of rich material about young people which can be used to generate further reflexive discussion in sex education. In this study loosely structured (mixed and single sex) group interviews were conducted with young people, from countries in Southern and Eastern Africa, about their lives, identities and their relations with others. In these, young people were positioned as experts, with the adult researchers trying to establish friendly and non-judgmental relations with them and encouraging them to set the agenda. In some counties the young people were also asked to record significant experiences in diaries. Gender and sexuality emerged as key categories through which boys and girls defined themselves and others, yet sexuality was also reported as a topic which was rarely discussed with adults including teachers. I argue for sex education teachers to be like the UNICEF researchers – friendly, non-judgmental and self-reflexive, aware of themselves as resources modelling versions of gender and authority. Boys and girls, in all countries, tended to define themselves in opposition to each other, notably in relation to sexuality, with male initiated sexual desire constructed as the main source of attraction between the sexes, though these gendered versions of self and sexuality were often contradicted in the diaries they kept. In interviews conducted in all the countries girls were distinguished as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ in relation to sexuality, and the effect of this was to circumscribe girls’ behaviour – including their capacity to talk, in mixed groups especially, about sexuality and to challenge forms of control emanating from these moral binaries. In response to these findings, I advocate and develop sex educational pedagogies and activities which aim to help students to explore the (different) ways they construct their gendered identities, in various sites, including school and the sex education class. I also suggest specific ways of working with boys and girls which encourage students to challenge forms of gender polarisation, in which they may be invested. For these mitigate against boys and girls taking themselves as resources and freely discussing gender and sexuality in sex education.

Introduction

Education has been described in Southern Africa as a ‘vaccine’ against AIDS (Coombe and Kelly, 2000) because of the coincidence between lower rates of HIV infection and higher levels of educational participation. This vaccine is less available to girls than boys, with girls, in Sub-Saharan Africa, tending to drop out of school earlier than boys. The ratio of girls’ to boys’ enrolment in primary and secondary school in Sub-Saharan Africa, in 1999, was 82 per cent (cited in UNICEF, 2004). Girls drop out of school for a number of reasons, such as domestic and caring obligations at home (made more pressing in the light of AIDS), sexual harassment at school and parental concerns about mixing with boys, pregnancy and parents prioritising their sons’ over their daughters’ education when negotiating school fees. Girls are more likely to contract HIV than boys (according to UNICEF (2003) more than two out of three newly infected 15–24-year-olds in Sub-Saharan Africa are female) and ‘out of school girls’ are especially vulnerable. For example, in Manicaland, Zimbabwe, infection rates in 1999–2000 among 15–16-year-olds were, 4.8 per cent for ‘out of school’ girls and 1.3 per cent for ‘school going’ girls, and among 17–18-year-olds were 8.4 per cent for ‘out of school’ girls, and 1.4 per cent for school going girls (Gregson, Waddell and Chandiwana, 2001).

Girls who pursue schooling for longer, according to the UNESCO EFA monitoring report (UNESCO, 2003), develop life skills, confidence and enhance their employment prospects, and, consequently, are more likely to delay heterosexual relations and to enter these on a relatively equal footing. As the report states, “*more educated women have better job prospects and have greater value outside the home. . . and are better able to influence family decisions*”(UNESCO, 2003, p.160). This is contrasted with the situation of girls who drop out of school early, who are much more dependent on men, and more likely to engage in early and risky heterosexual behaviour.

The UNESCO EFA monitoring report advocates investing resources to make the schooling of girls a more viable and attractive option. It proposes, for example, replacing school fees for primary education with state funds. This is because in countries like South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Rwanda where primary school fees (or PTA or community charges) are levied, poorer families have difficulties raising these and often prioritise education for their sons over their daughters. The removal of primary fees or community charges would be the “*single most effective means of raising primary enrolments and reducing gender disparities in the short term*”, according to the EFA report

(UNESCO, 2003, p.268). (With the removal of primary school fees, governments, of course, would need to channel resources to meet the demand for more classroom space, teachers, books etc. brought about by increasing enrolment.) The report also argues for investment to make schools, especially secondary ones, more girl-friendly, for example, by improving toilet facilities or constructing more schools closer to people's homes, thereby cutting travelling distances, and minimising the dangers schoolgirls might experience going to and from school.

Creating equal opportunities for primary and secondary education for boys and girls is essential for establishing equal and non-exploitative gender relations – particularly pertinent in the light of HIV/AIDS. However, as I shall argue in this article, schools are not gender neutral institutions which simply develop the social and intellectual skills of all its pupils, but may be experienced by boys and girls quite differently and may carry particular risks for girls. I shall be focusing on what happens *inside* schools, addressing schools as important sites in which gender identities and relations (and inequalities) are constantly negotiated, contested and produced. This means thinking about resources not just as things with monetary values (though, in pursuing gender equality, it is important to argue, as above, for more state provision for primary and secondary education), but also as the lives and identities of pupils in and outside school.

The lives and identities of pupils are not usually constructed as resources either by researchers or teachers, and, in this article, I shall address how teachers can tap into the rich potential of pupils, by making them the key resources. In this sense, then, the article is partly about pedagogies, and ones which encourage boys and girls to reflect upon and talk about themselves and their relations with others. My focus is on HIV/AIDS and sex education, which, in response to the crisis precipitated by HIV/AIDS, has been or is being introduced in many schools and colleges in Southern and Eastern Africa. Clearly young people need to be taught about AIDS and its modes of transmission, but this does not mean that they should become the passive recipients of sex education. I argue for pedagogies which engage with the cultures and identities of pupils, and the significance *they* attach to gender and sexuality, and I suggest that by addressing pupils as resources in this way and encouraging self-reflective talk among and between boys and girls, the kind of polarised gender identities which many young people routinely develop and inhabit in and outside school may be broken down.

In this article, I shall be drawing, partly, on a UNICEF-funded study, conducted in Southern and Eastern Africa on the lives of boys and girls and their gendered and sexual identities,¹ to suggest pedagogies as well curricula resources for pupil-centred forms of HIV/AIDS/sex education. (I participated in this research as a consultant with Fatuma Chege.) I argue that the ways some of our adult researchers related to the girls and boys they were interviewing provide models for appropriate pedagogies in HIV/AIDS/sex education. I examine how extracts from the interviews conducted may be used as resources in sex education to stimulate critical discussion between boys and girls in class. Good curricula resources are self-generating in the sense that they spark off self-reflection and dialogue which, in turn, become resources. If sex education teachers are to centre on pupils and address them as active, gendered and sexual beings, they need to develop activities and exercises which are gender sensitive, and encourage and enable both boys and girls to reflect on their lives and various identities. Such activities and exercises aim to promote egalitarian gender relations, as I shall discuss and illustrate.

My focus in this article is chiefly with boys and girls attending schools, though many young people, and especially girls, as discussed, drop out of school. While measures need to be taken to encourage and enable more children, and notably girls, to attend school, ways need to be developed of reaching and addressing 'out of school' children through the creation of participatory sex educational and life skills programmes 'out of school' and their extension into youth clubs, football clubs etc. (see Walsh, Mitchell and Smith, 2003, on working on out of school HIV/AIDS projects with young people in Cape Town).

Assumptions about gender, identity and sexuality

In conceptualising young people as active and gendered, I am assuming that their gender identities are not fixed but are constructed from the cultural resources available to them. How they feel and behave as boys and girls is not determined by some inborn essence of masculinity or femininity. Our gender identities, rather, are socially derived – who we are and how we see ourselves depends very much upon popular ways of classifying and treating boys and

¹ A book based on this study: Pattman and Chege (2003a) *Finding our voices: gendered and sexual Identities and HIV/AIDS in education* is available from Rob Pattman, pattman@ukzn.ac.za.

girls, men and women, and the importance attributed to these. Young people, are not, however, dupes of ‘socialisation’, as they have often been portrayed in studies of ‘sex roles’ (see Connell, 1995). Gender identities are not like shoes that we simply step into, but are constantly negotiated as we interact with others. They are not things that we have but things that we do or perform (Butler, 1990) – and that are partly forged through the language we use to describe ourselves and others (Foucault, 1979). Because these performances become so habitual and taken for granted, it may appear that gender is, indeed, something that we have which determines our behaviour.

I am also assuming that gender identities are often expressed and affirmed through sexual desire, and that sexual desire is not something which is purely instinctual and preprogrammed. Characteristics and forms of behaviour are constructed as sexually appealing – a practice that is strongly gendered and influenced by popular culture. Sexuality is not something that becomes meaningful and significant only as we approach adulthood. It is, however, constructed as a key marker of adult identity in many societies, as Epstein and Johnson (1999) argue, by adults wishing ‘innocence’ on children and imagining them as asexual. This may result in an acute disjunction between the rationale of formal sex education, where it exists, and the concerns, interests and needs of young people as they articulate them.

If identities are constantly negotiated in relation to others, the implication is that there is no unitary self. Our identities are revealed in our ‘performances’, and how we act and behave and what we say depends on the context and the people with whom we are interacting. In this sense, we could characterise identities as ‘multiple’ (Hall, 1992). Pupils must be made the key resources in sex education, with the class itself being seen as a particular site in which boys and girls present themselves and perform gender. I shall be advocating approaches to teaching sex education which play with and change the class context and dynamics, and which address boys and girls not as unitary gendered subjects, but explores with them the different and often contradictory ways they present themselves.

The UNICEF Study - methodology

The assumption that young people are active, gendered and sexual beings, and that sex education, therefore, must engage with the cultures and identities they forge, was at the heart of the UNICEF project which I was co-ordinating.

Indeed, the rationale for conducting this research was to collect information from boys and girls about their lives in order to develop appropriate and relevant sex educational resources. This study focused on how young people constructed their gendered and sexual identities, and was conducted mainly among school children in Botswana, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The young people were interviewed about their relations with and attitudes towards people of the same and the opposite sex, parents and teachers, interests and leisure pursuits, pleasures and fears, future projections and role models. But within these broad themes they were encouraged to set the agenda and pursue issues which they deemed significant to them (see Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002, for an account of this interviewing approach). The emphasis was on addressing the participants in the study as active agents and finding out how *they* constructed their identities and their relations with others, and the significance *they* attached to gender and sexuality.

The interviewers – men and women from their early 20s to 50s – were trained to respond to issues the young people raised and to try not to be judgmental – for example, not expressing condemnation (verbal or non-verbal) if young people spoke positively about fighting or trying to change the subject, but sticking with this and asking them questions, in a spirit of curiosity and interest, about their views on fighting.² Some of our interviewers engaged the young people in dance and clapping and short ritualistic games prior to conducting the interviews and this seemed to be very effective in helping them feel at ease with the interviewer.

The interviews were usually mixed, though some single sex interviews were conducted, and in Zambia the research team, on occasions, combined the two, with single sex discussions followed by mixed plenaries. In some countries, the interviews were supplemented with other young person-centred methods. In South Africa and Botswana, the researchers asked their (teenage) subjects to keep diaries. When writing up their diaries which they were asked to do at the end of every day for a week, the young people were given certain questions to which to respond. These were about significant events, emotions and relations were open-ended and encouraged the diary keeper to elaborate

² This approach to interviewing young people was strongly influenced by the study conducted by Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman on boys in London. See Frosh, S., Phoenix, A. and Pattman, R. (2002). *Young masculinities, understanding boys in contemporary society*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

and provide illustrations. I elaborate later, on the use of diaries in conjunction with interviews, as well as the use of single sex followed by mixed discussions and the implications of these for developing appropriate resources for HIV/AIDS and sex education.

The researchers in the various countries were free to select their samples, within an age range of 6 –19, and their research sites. All the young people selected were black African and were usually in their mid to late teens. Only in Zambia did children below ten participate, perhaps reflecting our researchers own assumptions that children do not have much to say about sexuality until they reach puberty. Indeed, in Zimbabwe, our researchers were refused permission to interview school children who were under the age of 16 years. This was because the Ministry of Education in Zimbabwe assumed that children under 16 were either not having sex or were not even thinking of or talking about sexuality.

In Botswana, three Junior Secondary Schools in Gaborone were selected in terms of the varying social class profile of their students. Six group interviews with six children per group, were conducted in each school. In Kenya, a total of 56 pupils were interviewed in two schools, one in Nairobi and another in Garissa, a predominantly Islamic and pastoralist province. In South Africa, 40 students (20 from rural and 20 from urban areas) were interviewed in KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo. Tanzania focused only on out-of-school youth, interviewing 43 in Mjiunwema and Changombe wards. In Zambia, interviews were conducted with children in the rural and remote Choma province, and in the more urbanised Kalulushi. Children representing a wide range of age groups were selected. Two interviews were conducted with six-year-olds, and six each with 7–9-year-olds, 10–13-year-olds and 14 –18-year- olds. In Zimbabwe, forty 16–18-year-old pupils were selected for interviews in two schools in low income urban areas in Harare and Mashonaland East. Twenty-eight out-of-school teenagers in a low income area in Harare were also interviewed. In all the countries, roughly equal numbers of boys and girls participated in the studies.

Researchers in Kenya and Botswana also observed six HIV/AIDS and life skills lessons in schools, focusing not only on the content of the lessons but also on the pedagogies and the interaction between teachers and girl and boy pupils. In Botswana, teachers were also interviewed about their experiences of teaching HIV/AIDS and life skills classes.

Researchers from Rwanda participated in this study but they were required by their Ministry to use mainly quantitative methods, and to focus more on teachers and their attitudes to sex education and less on young people. In Rwanda, 728 questionnaires were administered to student and practising teachers about their views as potential or actual HIV/AIDS educators.

Some key findings from the UNICEF study

How young people responded to being addressed as experts in interviews

Many of the young people reported enjoying being listened to by interested adults and taking the interview in the directions they wished. Our researchers, male and female, in their 20s and in their 50s, established relations with the young people which enabled and encouraged them to:

- Put questions to the researchers about concerns they had regarding relations with boyfriends and girlfriends and with parents, and also about HIV/AIDS. Clearly, they saw the researcher as a figure of authority who was not authoritarian but accessible and interested in them and wanted to help them.
- Display powerful emotions (loud laughter, notably from boys in mixed groups, raised voices, surprise, disgust).
- Raise 'sensitive' issues, for example, girls telling the researchers about being sexually harassed by boys and male teachers, and boys communicating fears of violence, being bullied, and being 'rejected' by girls.

Sexuality usually emerged spontaneously in the interviews with children of all ages – without it being introduced by the interviewers – most notably, when young people were discussing their relations with contemporaries and adults of the opposite sex. Whether the young people spoke about sexuality in positive or negative ways they clearly attached much significance to it, and, contrary to popular presumptions of 'innocence' of children below puberty (or in the case of the Ministry of Education, below 16), the very young children in Zambia also raised and spoke about sexuality in emotionally engaged ways. Indeed, six-year-old children from Choma actually spoke of participating in

sex themselves, and the care they took to conceal this from parents (see Pattman and Chege, 2003a).

Such findings underscore the importance not only of developing sex educational programmes for children including very young children, but also of adopting pedagogies which address them as active agents.

Constructing gender identities as opposites

The young people our researchers interviewed tended to speak about boys and girls as opposites with nothing in common, not only in regions where gender relations were more formally segregated but also where roughly equal numbers of boys and girls attended mixed primary and secondary schools. In Garissa, a predominantly Muslim and rural area in Northern Kenya, where most girls were withdrawn from school as they approached puberty, schoolgirls expressed shock and surprise at even being asked by our researchers if they ever played with boys. This question seemed less shocking when put to girls and boys in countries and regions where school attendance was more formally mixed. But when asked whether they would like to change sex for a day, young people from these areas, and boys especially, were not at all enamoured with the prospect. For example, teenage boys in Nairobi, Kenya, expressed horror constructing boys as active, free and strong and girls as passive, tied to the home and emotionally and physically weak. Girls in Nairobi also presented boys negatively as 'loud', 'rough' and 'rude', though some envied boys their freedoms to stay out late and mix with friends, and wanted, for this reason, to change sex. In some mixed interviews, notably in poorer urban areas where boys positioned themselves as strong and independent and girls as weak, the girls resisted these constructions, generating further conflict as the boys sought to reassert themselves (see extract below from Harare, Zimbabwe).

Absence of cross gender friendships

Not surprisingly most of our participants – boys and girls who identified in opposition to each other – reported having no cross gender friendships. Sex was usually constructed as **the** source of attraction between boys and girls. But this compounded the difficulties of girls and boys mixing and socialising since this could be sexualised. Both boys and girls alluded to this, but the prospect

of mixing with contemporaries of the opposite sex held particular anxieties for many girls.

Sexual double standards

One of our main findings concerned the application of sexual ‘double standards’ to girls and boys. In every country, the young interviewees made a distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ girls, which centred upon their sexuality and regulated their behaviour.

In Zimbabwe, for example, the ‘salad girls’ (so called because of the colourful spaghetti tops they wore) came under particular criticism. The ‘salad girls’ lived in the affluent and low density suburbs of Harare, and were condemned by boys from lower class urban backgrounds, for going after richer men, staying out at night, being loud, wearing ‘fashionable’ and ‘provocative’ clothes. These were all taken as powerful symbols of ‘cultural’ violation, and these girls were constructed as too ‘modern’ and as aping western styles. It seems that these constructions of ‘salad girls’ were fuelled by anxieties of rejection, a common theme in all the countries generated by boys’ investments in being heterosexually powerful, and manifested, for example, in boys’ intense opposition (in all countries) to girls who were seen as rejecting their male contemporaries for more powerful ‘sugar daddies’.

Girls could be rebuked not only for mixing with boys and wearing certain kinds of clothes but also for expressing desire. Most of the girls, in all the countries, indicated that they did not have boyfriends, and many, notably from rural and poorer urban areas characterised these as inevitably oppressive relationships, which interfered with schoolwork, ended up in pregnancies and abuse, and conflicted with religious teachings. Their opposition to boyfriends no doubt reflected these fears, but it also seems to have been motivated by a desire to present themselves as ‘good’ (i.e. not overly sexual) – particularly in the mixed group discussions. Significantly, girls in Botswana and South Africa, did write about their boyfriends in the diaries they kept and in very positive ways.

Boys' constructions of heterosexual relations in interviews and diaries

In mixed group interviews, some boys boasted about sleeping with and dumping girls, yet in the diaries they kept, the same boys in South Africa, wrote highly romanticised accounts of their girlfriends or potential girlfriends, as well as heartrending pieces about being dumped by them. Some boys in their diaries said they wanted girlfriends for the sound advice they offered them and their 'sympathetic' nature. Prominent in the diaries of boys, though absent in the group interviews, were anxieties about heterosexual rejection. While boys talked about 'proposing love' to girls³ in group interviews, this was not presented at all as potentially problematic, and little or no mention was made of the girls' reactions, the impression given that boys got their way. In diaries, however, proposing love was shown to be a high risk activity, with success or rejection impacting significantly on the proposer's very sense of identity as a male.

HIV/AIDS and sex education

Many of the interviewees said they wanted to discuss issues about sexuality with their parents or guardians, but constructed them as 'old fashioned' and unwilling to discuss such matters. Relationships with teachers, especially male teachers, were often described as authoritarian, and in all the countries some male teachers were accused of having affairs with female pupils or pressurising them into relationships in exchange for marks or money.

Most teachers given questionnaires in Rwanda and interviewed in Botswana expressed discomfort about teaching or the prospect of teaching HIV/AIDS and life skills education. This was partly because of the embarrassment they felt or would feel at discussing issues of sexuality with children and also because they had no training and felt they lacked the skills and resources. Some teachers interviewed in Rwanda said they picked up information about HIV/AIDS from the media. The assumption perhaps is that HIV/AIDS teachers are conveyors of 'facts' about HIV/AIDS and that since these are quite limited, little formal training is required to teach them.

³ This was a commonly used phrase in all the countries in our research, and was always something that boys did to girls, and encompassed a range of ways of initiating displays of sexual interest, from asking a girl out to calling her 'sweetie' and 'baby'.

Some young people in Kenya and Zimbabwe, when asked about their experiences of HIV/AIDS and sex education, implied that it was taught in didactic ways, and focused not on their lives, but on sex presented by the teachers as something that was bad for them. In the HIV/AIDS and life skills lessons observed in Kenya and Botswana, however, there were opportunities for student discussion. But the girls were quiet and looked shy and uncomfortable, with boys participating much more and receiving more teachers' attention. Girls were even marginalised in group work, where, as observed in one lesson in Botswana, they acted like secretaries taking notes while boys dominated the proceedings.

Producing learner-centred resources from the research

Conceptualising pupils as potential resources means thinking about their identities not as fixed (by biology or 'culture') but as constructed and performed in specific contexts. It is, then, young people's *constructions* of their lives and identities which become the resources for learner-centred forms of HIV/AIDS and sex education, with young people being encouraged not only to talk about their lives and identities, but also to reflect upon the ways they construct these. Since the young people in our study were raising issues which were important for them and elaborating and illustrating them, the interviews (which we transcribed) make potentially rich and appropriate teaching resources for sex education for opening up self-reflexive discussions and promoting gender sensitivity.⁴ Extracts from the interviews, such as the following from an interview with 14-year-old Zimbabwean boys and girls in a high density suburb in Harare (interviewed out of school) where taken for granted assumptions about gender identities as homogenous opposites were challenged by girls, could be used very effectively for this:

Ok . . . how do your parents treat boys and girls; is it in any way different?

Rufaro (G): Girls are expected to be home by 7.00 p.m. otherwise they are chased away from home or beaten. Boys are left to do as they wish.

Farai (B): Ah . . . that's not true!

Maiba (G): Its true, boys can even spend the night out and no one will ask, but girls will be told to go back where they spent the night.

4

Fatuma Chege and I have produced a handbook for pupils comprising activities and exercises framed around extracts from the interviews in our research. This is currently being piloted by UNICEF in schools in ten African countries.

- Rudo (B): Its true, girls are chased away from home but boys can come home anytime, even after 10.00 p.m., its understood. But a girl has to explain where she was.
- Clever (B): What happens is, us guys don't get pregnant, so we have an advantage. . .
- Interviewer: So you are saying parents treat boys and girls differently?
- Rufaro: Yes, parents are easy on boys but make life tough for girls.
- Interviewer: So who is at an advantage?
- All Girls: Boys, boys (repeatedly).
- Interviewer: But don't you think when parents say girls should be indoors by six it's to protect girls?
- Jackie (G): Yes, but sometimes it's just too much.

The interview continues with the girls demanding equal rights and the boys protesting against this.

- Interviewer: So you boys are saying girls should be over-protected?
- Mudada (B) : No, we are saying life will be tough for her since she is *just a girl* .
- Maiba: But we want equal rights especially on treatment by our parents.
- Zuka (B): This issue of equal rights, we don't want to hear about it.
- Jackie: Yes we want equal rights (almost shouting).
- Rudo: Would you want to work in the garden as I do?
- Jackie: You guys, but you guys don't cook. . . If it's 6.00 p.m. and I'm not yet at home he [referring to her brother] shouts at me and at times almost beats me.
- Hondo (B): If she is late, then we have to see to it that *we discipline her*. We want to see her at home before six she can't be anywhere else after 6.00 p.m. unless if she is at the market. If she is not found there too. . .ah. . .but I can get home, even at 10.00 p.m. or even sleep out. My dad won't even ask for he thinks I am also *a father, a man, in the house too*. At times, I would have been looking for money just like he does. Anytime he comes home, no one asks about his whereabouts.

Taking the above extract, questions could be asked which encouraged pupils to think about:

- their own experiences and identities as boys and girls, making connections between these and the passage;

- boys in relation to girls – with the questions referring to both boys and girls, even questions starting with things which girls are expected to do;
- possibilities of defining masculinity and femininity differently, how definitions of masculinity and femininity regulate the behaviour of boys and girls.

For example, questions such as:

1. Why are girls expected to be home at 7.00 p.m. whereas boys can come home any time? Is this good or bad? Does this happen in your home or your friends' homes?
2. Do you think parents should protect girls? If so, protect them from whom or what, and how should they do this? Why should parents not also protect boys? What do you think Jackie means when she says parents protect girls too much? Do you agree or disagree with her that girls are protected too much?
3. What do you think Mudada means when he says life will be tough for a girl because she is 'just a girl'? Do you agree with him? Why does he say she is 'just a girl'? Do you think he would say he is 'just a boy'?
4. Do you cook at home? Are girls and boys given different duties at home? If so, what are these, and do you think boys or girls have it easier at home? Do you think brothers, like Hondo, should be able to discipline their sisters? Should sisters be able to discipline brothers?

Encouraging a voice to girls

If sex education is to be learner-centred and make the lives and identities of the learners its potential resources, single sex group work must be considered as an important strategy. This is because in single sex groups, as our researchers found when interviewing, girls in particular felt freer to express their desires and concerns without being labelled in derogatory ways. However, the problem is that these tend to reinforce assumptions that boys and girls are essentially different and in opposition to each other. As was found in the mixed group discussions, boys and girls were able to learn from each other, and for this reason, I would also advocate mixed group discussion as an important teaching strategy in sex education.

One research practice adopted by the Zambian team that generated a great deal of interest and debate by young people was to organise group work in two stages. First, same-sex groups were asked to identify and discuss the sort of problems they thought they, and people of the opposite sex, experienced. In the second stage, the boys and girls came together to present and discuss their findings. This could very effectively be incorporated as a learner-centred and gender sensitive pedagogy in sex education. Not only does it make the young people or learners' views the key resources, it encourages critical self-reflection, empathy, and communication with people of the same and the opposite sex. Furthermore, the experience of working in a single sex group may encourage girls to be more voluble in the mixed group discussions that follow. The Zambian team found that in some of the mixed plenaries, the girls were as outspoken and critical as the boys, and attributed this to the confidence and support they had gained in the single-sex group

Sex education should not focus, as it tends often to do (in quite detached ways) only on relations which people enter into outside class but on the gender dynamics and identities which are being forged in class. In order to encourage such self-reflexivity, boys and girls could be asked to work together in small groups to research the ways boys and girls as well as teachers interact in their schools. In the pupils' handbook, we have produced observation schedules to help structure such research, with questions about boys and girls in class and where they sit, how many questions they answer, how often they are told off or punished by teachers, how much background noise they make, whether there are disagreements between boys and girls in class, whether they interrupt each other when speaking, or laugh at each other, and what they do at break times, and whether they mix. This kind of work generates resources from pupil experiences which can then be discussed in sex education lessons, and not only encourages self-reflexivity and gender sensitivity between both boys and girls, but also self-confidence as young people become experts researching their own experiences of schooling and putting this on the agenda in sex education.

Our own researchers noted that boys took up more physical and linguistic space than girls in and outside class, and it is perhaps likely that pupil researchers would find this too. This could lead to discussions about why this happens, and whether the gender dynamics of the classes in school, and the sex education class itself can be changed. Even discussing such issues, I would suggest, promotes self-reflexivity and change in the sex education class.

Developing resources to address boys' as well as girls' problems

By encouraging a voice to girls and putting gender power relations on the agenda, rather than taking these configurations as fixed and natural, sex education might be perceived as aligning with girls against boys. The effect of this would be to harden stereotypical constructions of boys as naughty and girls as good, which already mitigate against possibilities of equal and friendly relations between boys and girls. It is vital that sex educators do not address boys as the common homogenous enemy oppressing girls, because this can alienate boys and reproduce misogynistic attitudes (Redman, 1996).

The gender theorist Bob Connell (1995) argues not only that there are different kinds of masculine identities, but also that these are ranked hierarchically. His description of 'hegemonic masculinity' refers to the dominant cultural stereotype of masculinity provided by the young people we interviewed, and associated with toughness, heterosexual attraction, confidence, aggression and sporting prowess. Many boys in our study identified with these ideals and 'performed' their gender, as we have seen, by asserting themselves and subordinating girls in the interviews. However, Connell warns that these 'hegemonic' ideals are fantasies to which men and boys are encouraged to aspire, but which few are actually able to attain. He suggests that such ideals impose unrealistic expectations upon boys and men, leading to frustration and anxiety for many – and leading to some boys being picked on by others for being 'subordinate' and falling short of particular ideals.

Influenced by Connell's work, Morrell (2003) reports on how boys he interviewed, in empathetic ways, in Durban schools, displayed sensitivity and concerns about their life prospects, very much at odds with hegemonic ways of conceptualising and displaying masculinity as tough, emotionally 'silent' and aggressive. Sex education also needs to promote this kind of self-reflexivity in boys, a major concern of Thorpe's (2002) in his fascinating account of how routine gendered performances (Butler, 1990) and bodily practices can be made topics of self-reflexive inquiry through various kinds of role play. This, in part, involves boys reflecting upon the problems that *they* experience in trying to define themselves as tough, highly sexual, macho and dominant, in opposition to girls. It should focus not only on the problems that girls face as a result of boys distancing themselves from their versions of femininity and trying to live up to cultural stereotypes of tough men – sexual harassment, restrictions on movement, dress and marginalisation in mixed

groups, difficulties articulating sexual desire – but also on the difficulties that these expectations present to boys, and the competition that they generate between them.

In Zambia, the girls who had been asked to reflect on the problems boys experienced, provided in the mixed plenaries, very rich and nuanced accounts of these. For example, boys being blamed and even beaten for failing to outperform girls in school; being teased for being small and for having small penises; not being able to show anxieties and not receiving emotional support from parents; having to ‘propose love’ to girls and being rejected, and being expected to become the main breadwinners at times of high unemployment. Interestingly, in these plenaries, the boys did not try to reassert themselves (as they tended often to do when girls challenged conventional gender polarities in mixed interviews), but related to the girls as people who were empathising and sympathising with them. There is no doubt that this was attributable to the nature and format of the exercise they were doing, namely, being asked to think about the problems of the other sex, and doing so initially in single sex groups. The single sex groups allowed the girls to try out their views on boys’ problems and elaborate on these without being interrupted, coerced or policed by boys, and to feel confident about articulating and supporting this when it came to the plenary. In these mixed plenaries, also, boys showed concern and sympathy for girls’ experiences of sexual harassment.

Raising possibilities of boys and girls as friends

Questions about the possibilities of boy-girl friendships – what forms they can take, how similar they can be to same-sex friendships – need to be given prominence in sex education. Such relationships are clearly only possible if boys and girls become less invested in seeing and defining themselves in opposition to one another. Furthermore, they may be less likely to do so if opposite-sex friendships are placed on the agenda of sex education.

The critique of the polarisation of gender identities around sexuality has become particularly pressing in the light of HIV/AIDS. If boys and girls construct themselves in opposition to each other, in part through sexuality, how do they develop relations with each other which enable them to interact and socialise, let alone sexual relations? How can boys and girls relate sexually when they barely know each other except through ‘propositions’ initiated by boys and sexual harassment perpetrated by boys against girls?

Heterosexual relations, which are entered into on the basis of this radical polarisation of gender, are, I suggest, likely to be particularly unsafe with respect to HIV/AIDS. If males and females have little in common and if females are not expected to assert themselves in relation to sex, possibilities of *negotiating* sexual relations, whether to have sex, and if so, whether kissing, cuddling or penetration, and if penetration, whether using condoms, would seem to be very constrained. Furthermore, the construction of males as the possessors of the sex drive, aligned with the difficulties of developing cross gender friendships, suggests that many sexual encounters may be fleeting ones, thus increasing people's chances of contracting and spreading HIV/AIDS.

Partly because both boys and girls tended to construct members of the opposite sex as a different species, some of them, when interviewed in single sex groups in our study, were desperately keen to know how members of the opposite sex discussed them and their relations with them. Sex education programmes should build on this and develop activities and resources which *require* boys and girls to work together to investigate how they think about themselves and each other. For example, boys and girls could alternate between being interviewers and interviewees, asking and responding to the same sorts of questions (defining boys and girls and exploring differences and similarities between them) which were asked in our study, which generated so much interest and enthusiasm. Such activities not only require that boys and girls work together, but also promote empathy and communication between boys and girls. Programmes need to be developed where boys and girls see the point of working together, where the input from both boys and girls is seen as necessary, and not where they are compelled to sit together and do similar tasks. As Holland (2003) and Prendergast and Forrest (1997) note in their research with pupils in their early years and in secondary schools in Britain forcing boys and girls to work together may actually succeed in polarising gender relations.

The construction of males as sexual predators resonated with the numerous complaints about sexual harassment from boys and men made by many of the girls our researchers interviewed, a finding corroborated by interview and ethnographic studies in schools in South Africa (Morrell, 1998 and 2000, Human Rights Watch, 2001, Jewkes, Levin, Mbananga and Bradshaw, 2002, Bhana, 2005). Morrell (2000) has argued for the provision of more single sex schools to provide safe and supportive environments for girls. The problem, however, with separating girls from boys, is that it denies possibilities of girls

and boys working together to develop less polarised relations with each other, relations which do not entail sexual harassment. Sexual harassment should be seen and addressed in sex education as part of a vicious circle, for the very construction of boys as sexually avaricious and girls as objects of their desire, makes it difficult, as I have argued, for boys and girls to develop friendships and heterosexual relations built on mutual respect and trust.

Generating resources to address multiple gendered identities

Rather than addressing girls and boys as unitary gendered subjects, HIV/AIDS and sex educators need to develop approaches which explore, with girls and boys, the different and contradictory ways they present themselves and talk about sexual desire and the opposite sex in different contexts, as our researchers in Botswana and South Africa found when comparing how the same boys and girls presented themselves in diaries and group interviews.

Boys and girls were not expressing their real uncensored selves in their diaries as opposed to the group interviews, but identifying and performing gender differently in these different contexts. Their contradictory accounts provided insights into the ways talk about sex was regulated for both boys and girls. Whereas many boys could acquire status from their peers by speaking openly and explicitly about their sex drive as well as by demeaning girls as objects for them, girls had to be careful not to talk about their sexual desires or about boyfriend relationships for fear of being labelled bad. It may be that boyfriend-girlfriend relations were very negative in the ways the girls described them, but I also want to suggest that girls had a powerful interest in presenting them like this. By doing so, they were showing themselves publicly, in the group interview, to be good girls who resisted these kinds of relations. Whereas for the boys the diaries seemed to provide a safe space to be 'romantic' and to show how much they were affected by girls who dumped or rejected them, for the girls, diaries seemed to provide an opportunity, perhaps, for articulating sexual desire. The diaries also seemed to provide opportunities for boys to articulate fears and anxieties.

It may be that some learners want to read out extracts from their diaries in class or the teacher reads them out without divulging the identity of the writer. Such resources could be extremely powerful in promoting discussion around for example, relations with people of the same and opposite sex, with parents,

teachers, violence, sexual harassment etc., and also in taking discussions in directions which are perhaps not normally traversed in class.

Another possible way of generating resources which address pupils' multiple gendered identities is through drama. Drama has been used very effectively in HIV/AIDS and life skills educational initiatives to engage young people, communicating messages about modes of transmission, safer sex, gender power relations etc. in entertaining ways. For example, 'Soul City', a high profile educational campaign in South Africa has raised key issues about gender, sexuality and HIV/AIDS through prime time TV and radio dramas, and has produced texts with questions relating to these to stimulate discussion in groups of young people. Initiatives such as these have sometimes been described as 'edutainment', – the theme of the popular 'road shows', enacted earlier this year in towns in Lesotho which used a variety of fun activities such as drama, games and music to grab people's attention and, at the same time educate about HIV/AIDS, gender and sexuality (Mokuku, 2005). Drama can provide a powerful resource for discussing significant issues and concerns about gender and sexuality which would never normally be raised in class and with teachers. When drama is improvised by the young people, who select the characters and settings, and create the dialogue in relation to certain themes like boyfriends/girlfriends, relations with parents, problems for girls and boys, it becomes particularly powerful as a medium through which to explore different contexts and different identities. Improvised drama (in mixed groups and where there are male and female characters) *requires* that boys and girls work together (like the research activity mentioned earlier), and how they do so and how this shapes the drama can be discussed, along with the content of the drama (see Pattman, 1996).

Disposable cameras given to students to record aspects of their lives, also allow students to generate resources about themselves in contexts outside the classroom. Like the improvised drama, the photos, as Claudia Mitchell and her colleagues found, may become powerful resources for provoking reflexive discussion and for highlighting gendered concerns not usually communicated to adults and teachers, for example, girls' concerns about unsafe spaces in school (Mitchell, 2005).

Aspects of popular culture can be appropriated and used to generate talk about sexuality and gender in the classroom. Many young people, and especially girls, identified popular culture – magazines and soap operas in particular – as their main sources of information about sex and boyfriend–girlfriend

relationships. Indeed, perhaps this partly accounted for the superior knowledge shown by girls over boys, in some countries about HIV/AIDS and sex, despite the stereotyping of males as having powerful sexual drives. Teachers drawing on such resources may enable pupils to address *in class* their sexual identities and cultures (what Epstein and Johnson, 1999, writing about British pupils call ‘pupil sexual cultures’). This may be particularly effective used in conjunction with role-playing activities. For example, ‘problem pages’, where people write to ‘agony aunts’ for advice about emotional problems and problems with sexual and non-sexual relationships, could be taken from magazines and used to stimulate discussion about the kinds of problems that they have as boys and girls, and whether and how these might be resolved. Then learners could be asked to present their own problems as well as taking on the role of agony aunts and dispensing advice for others (see, for example, the ‘Aunt Stella’ game developed in Zimbabwe, Kaim, 2002). Learners should not necessarily be encouraged to accept the sorts of messages about gender and sexuality being communicated in particular images and stories in popular cultural texts like comics, magazines and soap operas. Indeed, critical discussion should be promoted about how males and females are represented in these.

These sorts of activities attempt to engage with pupils and their gendered and sexual cultures by involving them as ‘both producers and consumers of narratives about sexuality, HIV/AIDS’ (Walsh, Mitchell and Smith, 2003).

Thinking about teachers as resources

Teachers, themselves, must be understood as resources, not in the sense of being fountains of knowledge, but as significant men and women in the lives of young people who convey powerful messages about gender in their everyday interactions. Many of the young people we interviewed attached much significance to the gender of teachers, and sometimes, constructed male and female teachers in quite polarised ways. Women teachers were idealised, by some of the boys in South Africa and Botswana as counsellors, as people they felt able to talk to about problems, precisely because they perceived the men teachers as hostile to them and likely to beat them. To promote gender equality among pupils, teachers need to relate to pupils in ways which do not invite these gender polarised constructions. For example, men HIV/AIDS, sex educators can demonstrate to pupils and other teachers that it is possible for males to be responsible, caring, sensitive, approachable, non-authoritarian, non-aggressive and pupil-centred, and that violence is not synonymous with

being male, and something which girls (and boys) have to put up with. Similarly, they can show that males can develop close and caring relations with girls, which are non-sexual, and non-harassing. Interviews with teachers with 'caring' posts in a black township school near Durban – a guidance counsellor and a life orientation teacher – both women, suggested that these were very much constructed as women's jobs, with both teachers laughing incredulously when the question was put if men could be life orientation or guidance teachers (Pattman and Bhana, 2005).

It is, perhaps, unrealistic to assume that practising teachers can become student-centred especially when teaching a topic which elicits considerable embarrassment. They may, indeed, identify as teachers and professionals precisely by distancing themselves from their pupils. Indeed, it is for this reason, that some schools have invited outsiders including peer educators to deliver HIV/AIDS and sex education (see e.g. Pattman and Chege, 2003b on student peer educators, from University of Cape Town, teaching HIV/AIDS education in local schools). Unlike the teachers, peer educators have been trained to teach HIV/AIDS education in pupil-centred ways, and also, unlike them, have no interest in asserting their authority through distancing themselves from the pupils. They are closer in age to the pupils than most of the teachers, a factor which may encourage mutual identification between educator and pupil and facilitate pupil-centred approaches (Campbell, 2003).

But this kind of outside intervention may not be available or be unreliable and unlikely to be sustained on a regular and long term basis. For this reason, I want to suggest that the introduction of forms of HIV/AIDS education into schools in Southern and Eastern Africa, ought to require complementary programmes of in-service and pre-service training for teachers. These programmes must engage with the very ways teachers identify and present themselves as men and women if sex education in schools is to excite pupils and promote gender equality. They should enable teachers to become pupil-centred, and should not be short and didactic but work with teachers, over a sustained period of time, in ways which encourage them to reflect on:

- their own gendered identities and how they construct and relate to boys and girls, men and women
- the gender dynamics and power relations at school and in class and their own practices in relation to these

- the various cultures and identities of boys and girls at school
- how to make these resources for HIV/AIDS sex education.⁵

Another important reason why training in HIV/AIDS and sex education, along the lines advocated above, should be targeted at teachers is that schools are not gender neutral institutions and teachers may be implicated, as we have seen, in promoting gender polarised relations among their pupils. For example, conveying by their general gendered performances that authoritarianism is masculine and caring feminine; by their failure to address the gender dynamics in their classes that boys are loud and girls quiet; by allocating domestic and cleaning duties to girls that girls are domestic and boys are free; and by their sexual harassment of girls that sexuality and aggression are linked and are features of masculinity. Studies by Mirembe and Davies (2001), Biersteker and Hermanus (2003) and Dunne, Leach, Chilisa, Manndeni, Tabulana, Kator, Forde and Asamoah (2005) have explored the ‘hidden curriculum’ in schools in Africa, and support our own findings about how gender polarisation is encouraged through this. HIV/AIDS educational initiatives must involve training teachers to become gender sensitive and reflect on such aspects of the hidden curriculum.

HIV/AIDS education as a subject on the school curriculum may be resisted not only by reluctant teachers but also by other adults in the community, notably parents. This is most likely to be the case in predominantly rural and also Islamic areas such as Garissa in Kenya, where, our researchers noted, parents were particularly concerned about ‘protecting’ their daughters from boys, and, for this reason, many of them withdrew their daughters from school as they approached puberty. While this may be an extremely difficult task, parents need to be persuaded of the importance of HIV/AIDS and life skills education for their children. Teachers who have themselves been trained as HIV/AIDS and life skills educators, in the ways mentioned above, might be best equipped to do this, presenting HIV/AIDS and life skills education not as being focused on sex but more generally on the lives, cultures and identities of young people. Such an approach would aim not to promote sex but to empower young people and help them to protect themselves.

⁵ Fatuma Chege and I have also produced a *teachers’* handbook, with learner-centred exercises framed around interviews with pupils and teachers and observations from HIV/AIDS lessons which is intended for use in teacher training.

Conclusion

I have argued for learner-centred approaches to HIV/AIDS and sex education which make the gendered lives and identities of the learners the key resources. This requires teachers to develop strategies which tap into the rich potential of their pupils. I have drawn on an interview based, UNICEF-funded study with young people in Southern and Eastern Africa to suggest such strategies. In this study, the researchers established friendly and non-judgmental relations with their interviewees, and encouraged them to set the agenda by picking up on issues which they raised. Teachers of HIV/AIDS and sex education should aim to develop such relations with their pupils. This is in contrast to the didactic and authoritarian pedagogic relations which, we found, characterised the delivery of much HIV/AIDS education. This would require investing in teachers as resources and developing pre-service and in-service programmes for potential HIV/AIDS and sex educators which challenge the trainees to reflect upon themselves as men and women and as teachers, and to construct themselves in ways which allow them to address their pupils as active and creative. Teachers need to be trained not simply to equip pupils with the 'facts' of HIV/AIDS but how to explore the social and cultural worlds of their pupils, and the significance which their pupils attach to gender and sexuality.

I have argued, too, for an approach to 'gender equality' which entails breaking down polarised gender identities and relations, encouraging this and young people to become less invested in these must be a key aim of HIV/AIDS education. It is problematic that boys and girls commonly construct themselves with little in common and in opposition to each other. This seriously undermines possibilities of boys and girls playing, communicating and negotiating with each other and developing cross gender friendships. The stereotyping of boys as subjects and girls as objects of sexual desire makes such relationships particularly difficult to develop and sustain, and invites sexual harassment (a major problem for many of the girls we interviewed). This is hardly a good basis for developing safe, trusting heterosexual relations. For these reasons, a key aim of HIV/AIDS and sex education should be to promote possibilities of friendships between boys and girls, by making this an issue to be addressed, and by encouraging boys and girls to work productively together.

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