Chapter 8

Conclusions:
Getting real about sex: embedding an embodied sex education in schools

The working-class young men who participated in our group interviews, as we have seen, illustrated vividly their embodiment in youthful, lusty, male, smoker's bodies and showed how they were learning a heterosexual masculinity that mapped closely onto traditional (perhaps especially northern) white, working-class masculinities. They had already learned the hegemonic version of masculinity in their culture and community. They had discovered its apparent conflict with educational success, their own low standing in terms of earning potential, the competitive dynamics of 'laddishness' and the social rewards from their peer group of the hetero-sexualising performance of being 'up for it' - confident and enthusiastic about sex with women/girls. Their schooling, their training project attendance and even their participation in the research were opportunities for learning and rehearsing hetero-normative gender identities. Not exactly the impact we had imagined for our action research, but how could it be otherwise? We could not, of course, step outside of existing local and wider discourses and power relations in order to research them.

The same was true for the young women we interviewed. The discourses of adulthood through which they were negotiating their identities were gendered, classed and racialised. Social expectations of maternal and other caring roles were 'real' enough and some of them already had care responsibilities before becoming mothers. The subject positions offered them in education and welfare policy discourses take no account of such relations. As Aapola *et al* argue: 'The neo-liberal incitement of individualism, rational choice and self-realisation bump up against discourses of femininity creating contradictory and complex positions for girls' (2005: 7). In addition, girls from working-class families face a 'girl power' which 'tells them they can be what they want in a labour market that cruelly sets limits on any ambition, together with an education system that classifies them as fit for certain kinds of work' (Walkerdine *et al* 2001: 21). They bear the burden of the expectation of upward social mobility and risk being constantly failing subjects with only the individualised explanations of their position provided by psychological discourses (Walkerdine 2003; Thomson *et al* 2004). In this particular, economically deprived area, professionals' attempts to 'raise aspirations' for education or employment bump up against expectations of women as 'copers' at home, in this white, working-class mothering, unlike the way African

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Caribbean mothers in London expected to cope with work and mothering simultaneously (Duncan *et al* 2003b; Reynolds 2005).

For both the young men and the young women, education was failing to recognise the reality of their relationships and their subjective investments. The expectations and aspirations for adult lives in this community were clearly gendered, and mapped onto traditional gender roles particularly around parenting and breadwinning. Yet the gender-neutral language of education policy refers to 'pupils', 'students', 'workers' and 'parents' as if we are ungendered beings. SRE needs to engage with the existing lives and loves of young men and young women, and not only as future partners and lovers as implied by the discourse of child as person-to-be.

We now draw out our arguments from our overall findings about the contemporary politics and practices of sex education in the UK. As we do so, we emphasise the need to recognise educational subjects as embodied and gendered, to embed SRE more centrally in education and in schooling, and to embed an analysis of SRE in schools in wider cultural formations, specifically of gender and sexual normativity.

Embedding analysis of SRE in society

As Thomson has argued 'sex education both constructs and confirms the categories of "normal" and "deviant" which it regulates, monitors and controls… Education reflects the dominant politics of a society's institutions and sex education reflects the sexual politics of those institutions' (1993: 219). Our account of what teachers manage to achieve in the area of SRE is mindful of the structures they work within and pressures they are up against. Normative ideas about gender, sexuality, the role of work or of parenting in adulthood which we have glimpsed through the prism of SRE operate at the broadest societal level, anchored to social practices. This raises a dilemma for us: of wanting to argue for radical change and yet wanting at the same time to provide something of use to the teacher who has a limited domain of influence at school and is subject to national policy priorities.

Back in 1999, Chitty characterised teachers as 'caring but often frightened professionals' (1999: 297) since they had been unable to maintain consistent teaching or policy regarding sex education over the previous ten years as the Thatcher and Major governments meddled in order to get their right-wing politics into this area of the curriculum. Much remains the same. First, the pace of change, in policy and guidance, duties and legal responsibilities, and initiatives for funding or attainment targets has quickened and many teachers and head-teachers feel swamped by the burdens these impose. The Blair government's interest in sex education shows more continuity with Conservative agendas on family values and with neoliberal economic priorities than might have been predicted.

Second, the teachers' emotional state that Chitty (*ibid*) described seems little improved. Anxiety is palpable at all levels of education, and sex education is suffused with concerns that refract bigger tensions of British society. What are

our shared values, what is 'good for' children - and what is culturally-specific about either presumed consensus or what is taken as fact? What is the common value-base and curriculum for sex education that will invoke the wrath of no parents? How is a values-based education to be squared with multicultural value-plurality? What is the role of the school in promoting values anyway? If it is the school's role to promote social cohesion, does this require agreeing shared values? Anxiety about what parents or governors of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds are likely to object to, in practice, blocks clear thinking about what schools ought to deliver and how. Yet research finds that anticipated parental objection to sex education far outstrips reality. A value-free education may be an impossibility, but a different starting point could be in what girls and boys are entitled to learn.

The emotionally unhealthy dynamics in many British secondary schools create cultures of blame and accusation, so that teachers are reluctant to take responsibility for, or management positions on, issues perceived as risky. They defend their subject territory against imagined intrusion of either parents or other professionals because they feel threatened and are fearful of potential moral outrage and approbation. Our research was haunted by the spectres of the angry parent convinced that the SRE teacher had corrupted their child's innocence, and the outraged journalist hounding teachers who thought they were simply doing their job.

Gender is on the public agenda now, as are *certain* questions of sexuality, and although passions rage about how sexual orientation is viewed (for instance, threatening to split the Christian church), the passion and connectedness of intimacy are absent from policy formulations. Even when gender differences and sexual orientation are acknowledged, recognition of difference is limited by the binary boxes offered for its containment, and responses are limited by the individualistic and pathologising models that prevail. If, for some, gender norms are becoming more flexible, they are perhaps least so around issues of sexual orientation. The compulsoriness of heterosexuality is a 'pervasive, silent and often denied power that permeates formal education' (Epstein *et al* 2003: 12) and that is policed differently for (and by) boys and girls and requires they all take up a position as one or other gender. There are contradictory shifts: whilst for some it is becoming more publicly acceptable to express oneself openly about sexual matters, new risks emerge. Individualisation brings greater identity investment in sexuality and greater responsibility for sexuality as a matter of personal ethics. These investments and the moralities on which judgements are made differ for boys and for girls. As we have seen, the ungendered and desexualised official discourses of young people in schools can impact in troublesome ways. They lead to an idealized construction of the child-pupil as non sexual, and hence to the stigmatising or pathologising of those young people whose sexuality is evident. In addition, a particular and hetero-normative notion of sexuality is enforced in punitive ways. This, and failing to challenge the silence around, fear about and resistance to 'the homosexual other' lets down *all* pupils.

Teachers are caught in a double-bind: legally obliged not to discriminate between pupils on the grounds of gender and yet reading research findings

that single-sex discussions can work better for subjects such as SRE. There is also an increasingly loud pupil preference expressed, especially by girls, for some single-sex classes. Nurses, by virtue of their concern with health and therefore the body, are 'licensed' to employ a discourse of gender differences among young people. We recognise a tension here that feminists have long-agonised over between identifying gender as a significant social construct, and yet through this analysis further reifying such normative categories.

Radically rethinking sex education points to the broader social changes needed. Sexual empowerment or autonomy would be best learnt alongside autonomy in all spheres of life, and the ethical principles behind 'many valued elements of sexual experiences (e.g. communication, trust, active consent, pleasure, flexible negotiation, equality, etc.) should also exist in the relationships that make up a healthy society' (Heckert 2005: 1). As Heckert (*ibid*) points out, sex education in schools would probably receive more popular support if accompanied by non-directive, participatory and caring discussions about sex, sexuality and relationships in the wider community. For now, we restrict our focus to the goals we seek within educational practice. Our conclusions concern recommendations for SRE practice in class; for relationships in school; and for teacher education.

Embedding SRE in schools

By the end of our study we view SRE as a practice that is central to gender normativity and as key to treating young people as sexual subjects. However, it will fail in its goals and will fail young people unless schools actively and critically examine the gender, sexuality, body and beauty norms of society and specific peer group cultures. Wider social values cannot simply be ignored in the classroom of course. Furthermore, within schools, recognition of the differing perspectives and agendas of the multiple actors is essential. Here, in addition to recognising potential differences between pupil and staff priorities, by drawing together differing professional agendas in schools and contrasting education (pupil-based) versus health (client-centred) pedagogies, we can see the very different understandings of young people within these sets of professional practices. We make proposals for SRE practice on the basis of our findings and of a thought-exercise about the education of young mothers/mothers-to-be. This suggests an approach that is generalisable if we are prepared to rethink what education might look like. Finally we bring together our arguments for rethinking priorities in education overall.

The context for learning and teaching about sex, sexuality and gender has been changing in Britain and in post-colonial societies as the troubled implementation of the UN's (2000) Millennium Development Goals of gender equity illustrates (Aikman and Unterhalter eds 2005). This policy context has altered the curriculum in ways that have reduced the perceived importance of PSHE (Best 1999) and contribute to a split between different approaches to teaching or to understanding young people's development. Broadly this split is represented by an emphasis either on academic success or on personal well-being, and illustrates how the Cartesian dualism plays out in schooling today (Paechter 2006). This mind/body dualism underpins the importance attached

to schools' role in society, and to the low status of health education in schools (Buston *et al* 2002). PSHE, as a 'social' rather than academic subject, and SRE by association with the body, have been relegated to the educational sidelines as cross-curricular themes and asides to the school's main business. The mind/body split unravels when examined closely and has long attracted feminist critique for its gendered hierarchical associations. The falsity of splitting affect from the intellect also has substantial recognition within education, as initiatives such as Circle Time and programmes for emotional literacy indicate, but the particular policy agenda of the last decade has seen one particular school bully grow bigger and harder to avoid - what we have been referring to as the achievement agenda.

'School improvement' is driven forward in the name of 'raising standards', with standards reduced to the impoverished measure of success that is numbers of A*-C grade passes at GCSE. This agenda has exacerbated lack of consideration of pupils' personal development as well as trampled social justice concerns, whilst co-opting its language. The fact that this has eroded the school's welfare role, sacrificing pupil *well-being* at the altar of narrowly defined *education* is, in practice, admitted by the compensatory development of children's centres for multi-agency welfare work. Sometimes the same building, a school, operates as a nexus for accessing services and for multi-professional surveillance and intervention. *Every Child Matters'* comprehensive framework for children's services engenders partnership work towards shared goals, several of which support SRE. Such partnerships across health and education services are critical in SRE but paradigmatic differences between the approaches of differing professionals must be recognised. Where partnerships produce clearly identified professional roles and responsibilities they are to be welcomed, but where they allow children and young people's needs to be compartmentalised, allowing 'education' to continue to imagine it can disregard social, emotional and physical well-being and development, it could be unhelpful.

These educational agendas are now suffused with discourses of young people's gender, in terms of academic achievement: with a new concern for boys' rather than girls' achievements in secondary schools (Epstein *et al* 1998; Arnot *et al* 1999; Skelton 2001; Younger and Warrington 2005). New policy and legislative frameworks are emerging around choice and personalisation under New Labour in 2006. The standards and achievement agenda has sometimes come to be interlaced with a more personal or individualising agenda, and teachers and head-teachers told us repeatedly about this as a dominant form of attending to 'the personal' within learning but which could not extend explicitly to questions of sexuality or sexual identities. The sex education now on offer in most schools takes a specific and narrow form, hidebound by the regulatory requirements of the standards and achievement agenda and the moralism of contemporary political culture.

Many commentators, as well as some of our participants, have become extremely sceptical about the New Labour project of using SRE and education more generally for its social inclusion agenda. This social exclusion discourse propels individuals into the workforce without attending to the causes of

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poverty and inequality (Mizen 2003; Levitas 2005). It is a wolf in sheep's clothing, since it is not simply a slight variant on conservative family values, but something altogether more troubling. It represents the continuation and extension of the Thatcherite project of neoliberal economics and ruthless individualism but is even more insidious for its successful colonisation of everyday thought (Hall 2003). What concerns us is the power wielded by a hegemony so naturalised that its political values can barely be identified as such. As McRobbie has noted, the contradiction within the New Labour project hinges on 'the celebration of individualism which cannot be comfortably reconciled with traditional family values. Hence the problems of endorsing a full free market position which ends up promoting antisocial values' (2000: 102).

The teachers, head-teachers, PSHE co-ordinators and nurses we spoke to felt restricted and compromised by the contemporary policy and legislative frameworks within which they had to work. They found the current balancing act between SRE, or PSHE generally, and the NC difficult to maintain. Committed PSHE teachers showed us how the creation of markets in education produced new obstacles to good SRE through pressure to meet the achievement agenda. Schools' fear for their reputation and their position in the local schools' marketplace and hierarchy, concretised in the schools league table, narrowed their focus and made it hard for non attainment-related issues to win a place on school management agendas. The status hierarchy this produced between PSHE and league table subjects had direct implications for resources too. The consequences of competitive relations between schools were widespread and profound, becoming apparent in competitive thinking applied elsewhere. It established competitive relations between subjects over resources such as time or staffing, and in competitive bidding between PSHE topics for the scarce time-table collapse days. The logic of competition has made its way into many places, organisationally, where either cooperation or a coordinated overview would be preferable.

Personal learning and development were felt to be sacrificed to 'achievement' in the name of competitive advantage. Even more disturbing, we find pupils and teachers, as well as schools, expected to apply this logic to their thinking and decision-making about themselves. We are not the first to find that concerns with equity are displaced by concerns with 'school effectiveness' (Rassool and Morley 2000; Whitty 2001; Halsey *et al* 2006) and we conclude that the introduction of market forces into education and the consequent competitive relations between and within schools compromised their provision of education that supported pupils' social and emotional development.

Ofsted's recent (2005) report into the delivery of PSHE was dismal, concluding that it was largely failing young people. It supported our finding of the overarching need for staff training, and ideally for the delivery of PSHE subjects by specialist teachers, experienced and trained in the pedagogic approaches required by PSHE, not form tutors teaching it 'on the side'. It endorsed our argument that PSHE requires discursive approaches - suitable for considering values, active learning for skills development and to link information with experience, and an emotionally safe (or at least caring)

environment where respect and ground rules set the tone. PSHE had only been part of ITE for one of the participating teachers in our study and the PSHE post-graduate certificate in continuing professional development was not available until after our fieldwork. Effective training could, however, have involved peer observation, shadowing or mentoring to share good practice in-house or between local schools. Good PSHE teaching is, of course, good teaching across the curriculum, and attending to the relationships upon which any teaching and learning rests is seen by some as the bedrock of an 'emotionally intelligent' or as we would prefer to call it, a caring school. Organisations and training programmes exist (e.g. Antidote, Non-violent Communication, Transforming Conflict) to promote emotional literacy/articulacy and restorative justice approaches in schools as tools for improving a school's whole ethos, not just meeting the communication skills aims of the SRE curriculum. These offer a philosophy as well as a set of pedagogic tools.

The Ofsted (2006) report on Citizenship Education, in constructing PSHE as 'about the private, individual dimension of pupils' development' and 'Citizenship on the other hand [as] concerned with the wider public dimension, educating pupils about public institutions, power, politics and community – local, national and international – and equipping them to engage effectively as informed citizens' (*ibid.*: 14, para. 57) maintains traditional views of public and private, with their conventionally gendered overlay. Producing fit citizens apparently need not address matters of sexuality, identity or ethics surrounding family and sexual relationships. These are constructed as private concerns belonging to the domestic sphere, feminised and devalued, implying that matters of power, values, justice and respect are not important here too. The problem lies in trying to draw a boundary between what is 'social' and what is 'individual'.

The relationship between PSHE and CE is complicated and teachers can see lessons on friendship and relationships as CE because they deal with conflict resolution, an aspect of the KS3 curriculum. But pupils need to learn about negotiation and compromise, principles and pragmatism, values, consensus and difference - principles applicable at all levels from the personal to the local, national and international. Arguments about which curriculum a topic belongs to might be irrelevant in a holistic approach that rejected the logic of competition. PSHE and CE programmes can complement each other and both drugs education and SRE would seem ideally suited to study within both a social and a personal frame. Indeed it might well help to raise the status and alter thinking about young people's sexuality to explore it within the framework of citizenship, to consider specifically their sexual citizenship (see Waites 2005).

The current statutory framework for sex education in schools, as we have seen, makes significant strides towards answering young people's call to 'get real about sex' by at least requiring that all schools provide SRE that is more than biology. However, a peculiar political constellation of conservative family values and sexual morality, alongside more 'liberal' attitudes and hyper-sexualised cultural images, allows for interesting moves that sometimes grant

young people improved access to sexual health information and services. But this is often at the cost of adopting a medicalised approach to sexuality. Indeed by constructing sexual behaviour primarily through a discourse of risk, the discourse of pleasure remains muted and the chance to engage with young people's own agendas is missed. In addition, the compartmentalisation of such interventions within or without school often means they do not go far towards addressing young people as embodied sexual beings in the classroom more generally.

Even commentators who welcomed and were positive about the current sex education legislation have their reservations. Monk (2001) described much of the legislation in the area of sex education as 'reflect[ing] at best a democratic political compromise and at worst highly politicized 'moral panics' about AIDS/HIV, homosexuality and child sexuality which have little to do with the every day needs of real young people' (2001: 289). Teachers in our and other studies are critical of the way SRE is not informed by and does not even particularly *seek* to meet the needs of children or young people (Corteen 2006).

In addition, the concern to meet the wishes of parents or carers about SRE rides roughshod over the wishes and values of young people themselves. One of the consequences of marketisation in education is that the 'turn to parents as consumers' produces a turn away from pupils and a consideration of their views. As others have observed (Monk 2001; Lyon 2006), the children's rights agenda, enshrined tentatively in UK but more robustly in international law, is only slowly filtering through educational practice. Resistance to this is more institutional than individual if the practitioners we interviewed are representative of those working in schools. Schools have long been adult-run institutions embodying adult-centred approaches to the 'problem' of educating the young. Hearing and taking account of pupils' views is a profound challenge.

Schools with a faith-based ethos saw SRE as explicitly value-based and delivered it through the Family Life part of their RE curriculum. They were less comfortable with the Knowledge and Information strand, particularly, for some, regarding contraception and abortion. More typically, schools took refuge in the fact-based nature of part of the SRE curriculum. As we have seen, the school nurses all shared a contrasting view to that of the faith schools and a few of the other teachers. They saw giving sexual health information as a client-focussed service providing medical information, whether this was on a one-to-one or whole-class basis. They were confident in their teaching - having been trained to deliver this material to this age-group in class settings, were comfortable with active learning and discursive pedagogies and clear about the confidential nature of their one-to-one discussions. Their resolution to the values versus information formulation that caused stress for teachers was to distinguish clearly the 'facts' they imparted from the moral decisions young people would make about their own behaviour. They attributed young people moral agency, as their clients, and saw them as legitimate sexual subjects. This contrasted with schools' sense of accountability and orientation to parents, governors, the LEA, DFES and finally to pupils. This is what we

call a paradigmatic difference between health and education approaches to SRE in schools.

Head-teachers, on the whole, were more engaged with the achievement agenda than with how to implement the SRE Guidance. This seemed yet another resource-intensive initiative they could ill afford, and their sense of 'initiative overload' meant they had little energy to think creatively about links between academic and personal education. Some head-teachers saw the potential of personal and social education to contribute to pupils' personal development and to more effective learning across the curriculum but, in practice, their agendas were full with attainment and financial concerns. Most were relieved to delegate SRE as a discrete topic. It is SRE's combination of being low status but high 'risk' that makes it particularly problematic and hence an ideal candidate for anxiety-managing processes such as compartmentalisation or abjection. Some schools were committing to self-efficacy or emotional literacy programmes and these tended to be those doing poorly in the schools' league tables. These may be appropriate responses, but unfortunately can reinforce the idea that social and emotional learning is more basic than academic learning and is prioritised only as a remedial strategy to serve the achievement agenda.

When we asked head-teachers questions about SRE and its relationship to the achievement agenda, they sometimes seemed disconcerted about the intrusion of sexuality onto the school's management agenda. This reminded us that addressing sexuality in education disrupts the uneasy balance between public and private life (Epstein 1994a). Broaching the topic of sexuality in the mainly male head-teachers' office feels like 'taking the lid off a can of worms'. This feeling, like the urge to restrict classroom discussions of sexuality, stems from a construction of sexuality as in need controlling and containing, repressing or civilising that feminists and others have criticised. It invokes a hydraulic metaphor of pressure and release, such as that underpinning the male sex drive discourse (Hollway 1989). This view of sexuality and the model of power implied in the metaphor or classroom response are questioned by the discursive approach we have adopted.

Feminist post-structuralist writers, such as Debra Britzman, Bronwyn Davies, Valerie Hey, Patti Lather and Erica McWilliam, have written about the implicit but important role of sexual desire and eroticism in education, but the potentially sexual dimension of adult-pupil relations are not readily acknowledged in the popular sphere. Recently an education researcher wrote an academic article about heterosexual desire and relations between male teachers and female secondary school pupils in which she revealed her own attraction to one of her teachers whom she went on to marry after they had both left the school. The proposed publication of the article led to a sexual scandal and prurient interest from the press (Sikes 2006). It is revealing of the cultural attachment to the desexualised pupil discourse that more scandal attaches to a teacher and pupil who later marry than to the sexual gyrations of teenage pop stars or the sexual violence in some young boys' computer games.

What does it mean that studies such as ours find that teachers' professional views about what is good for pupils, schools or the education system differ from what the government thinks? It appears that teachers' and head-teachers' views are sidelined by governments that increasingly centralize education policy, seeking such control over what teachers do that they stipulate not only what curriculum to deliver, with what pedagogy, but even how to divide up the minutes of the literacy hour. Paradoxically perhaps, we agree with the FPA that SRE should be made statutory. However we would not want to see teachers handed a script since that would undermine the responsive pedagogies SRE requires.

PSHE coordinators highlighted the contradictions they felt in discussing sexual desire, sexual bodies and sexual practice with young people when, in the classroom context, they are positioned as pupils who can or should be educated into certain values. They found it hard to acknowledge 'publicly' (in the classroom) that pupils already had considerable sexual knowledge, feelings and some experience with partners. They were frustrated by the treatment of SRE and PSHE at school and national policy levels as separate from and subordinate to the academic NC subjects.

We conclude that there remain troubling contradictions between educational policies at the national level and the ways in which they are being implemented at the school level, despite some of these issues now reaching public agendas such as in discourses of human rights, inclusion and citizenship (Osler 2005; Mirza 2006). There remains a mismatch between young men and women's needs and wishes for sexualities education and the sex education that exists on the margins of the curriculum, where it reflects an economic agenda and attempt to enforce 'work ethic' norms. Not surprisingly then it fails to reflect what young men and women have told many studies they want from sex education – more attention to desire, emotions and the techniques and practicalities of sexual pleasure.

Embodied young women and education

We want to make constructive suggestions for improving SRE and to try to imagine a feminist SRE that does not subjugate the body. We use insights generated about the education of that most problematically embodied of pupils – the pregnant schoolgirl. If an approach can fit her body, it must surely allow more room than the usual. Adopting a female and pregnant model of the pupil also disrupts the naturalised masculine and desexualised default. Centring our thinking on the pregnant or mothering pupil might help shift the 'problem' mentality about her.

Education policy problematises young motherhood because it conflicts with the Government's economic priority of work, so it is refreshing when Graham and McDermott (2005: 21) turn the tables to ask what potential role policies could play in '*supporting* the identities and resilient practices young mothers develop in the face of social and material disadvantage'? How could education policy better support the education of young mothers? Teenage pregnancy may have been treated as having *implications for* education, but

education policy has not been developed *for* pregnant and mothering teens. Even discussions of implications have progressed no further than the debate over *where* to provide such education, in mainstream or separate, 'special' provision (Pillow 2004).

For the majority of young mothers in our study and in others, schools did not feel secure or positive places to be. Harris *et al* (2005: 25) write: 'Once they were pregnant they were often rejected and stigmatised, reinforcing messages that they were not welcome in the education system…a feeling that appears to have remained with them over time'. Even for those who did not have negative school experiences beforehand, pregnancy could bring feelings of intense vulnerability. The physical vulnerability felt by pregnant young women points to a broader problem of violence within British schools today (see e.g. Kagan *et al* 2006). Their struggles to move around the school safely, comfortably and to eat or visit the toilet when necessary, highlight just some of the bodily normative and regulatory aspects of schools.

Even without specific experiences of rejection or vulnerability, a young mother's increasing distance from education might not surprise us. Her perception is of the school's irrelevance to her new set of needs and growing priorities and we would support her 'primary maternal preoccupation' (Winnicott 1956) as wholly legitimate for a mother-to-be or mother of a small child and highly important for her child. Her concerns and the school's concern with her educational progress towards examinations, operate in different registers. Furthermore, the construction of the non-sexual, ungendered child pupil and the school's business of their cerebral development, leaves schools ill-equipped to deal with the physically changing, sexual body and potentially emotionally labile young woman experiencing pregnancy, or young mother with real, not just role-play, relationships to build, sustain or mend. She is not really, of course, a special case: all pupils have real relationships and emotions, but the image of her bulging body and perhaps tearful outbursts highlight the naturalised absence of emotion and the body from the dominant discourse of pupil, and the imagined interruption of the 'intellectual' by the 'emotional'. Despite school's concern with 'children', they seem remarkably disengaged from the embodied processes of family life and indeed are founded on an institutional devaluing of emotion and subjective experience.

Arguments about physical safety or relevant curriculum can imply the desirability of separate educational provision as was previously the case in Britain and elsewhere, although earlier homes for unmarried mothers and their babies were more concerned with containing shame and rescuing respectability than with education (Ineichen and Hudson 1996). Educational provision now tries to be inclusive and meet pupils' differing needs in a common setting. In the USA, there are still specific educational programmes for pregnant and mothering teens. Wendy Luttrell's (2003) ethnographic study of one such programme focused on the identity-work done by working-class teenagers to manage their shamed identities. The setting differs but the cultural politics described are similar to those in Britain (Phoenix 1991; Wilson and Huntington 2005).

Stigma and individualising blame is attached to non-approved sexualities or fertility pathways. Teenage mothers' motives are scrutinized in class blind, sometimes racialised ways. They are accused of 'looking for love' in a pathological way that other mothers are not. It is possible to eschew such psychological focus on the individual to the neglect of socio-economic factors, whilst still keeping in mind a concern for individual young women. These girls are painfully aware of being scrutinised and judged by others and are hurt by their depiction as lazy or irresponsible. With this grief comes insight too though and Luttrell describes them becoming more self-aware, tentatively expressing fears or mixed feelings. An emotionally engaged environment would, of course, attend to and support them in this.

Luttrell's analysis of this programme echoes the findings of previous studies and offers cautions for the education of young mothers and pregnant young women. The first feature of their curriculum she identifies is the representation of education as a responsibility of the girls, indeed a responsibility they bear for others: the teachers' mantra is: 'your child needs you to be educated' and 'if you won't do it for yourself, do it for your child', and unsurprisingly this 'educated motherhood' discourse featured in the girls' accounts: 'I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for my baby' (Luttrell 2003: 23). Second, there were striking 'absences and silences' especially around sexuality, bodies and pleasure. Ironically, female sexual desire was not only absent from the official curriculum, it was even more suppressed in this specialist provision than in mainstream education. If and when it was discussed, it followed the 'education as responsibility' line that 'as girls, they were responsible for practicing "safe sex" or abstaining, and not that, as girls, they were entitled to an education that would provide them with a sense of their own sexual desires and power *vis a vis* boys' (*ibid*.: 23). The third feature was the social redemption messages which included strict behaviour rules such as how the girls ought not to 'parade themselves' and should be 'respectable' and 'discrete' because by being pregnant they were already setting a 'bad example'. Education was the road to redemption, and the girls were delivering themselves from their 'fallen' status as teenage mothers. The 'education as responsibility' approach, whether related to pregnancy, motherhood or sexuality, framed education in terms that could limit a girl's sense of self-regard, rather than support or enhance it.

The white girls' attendance dropped off in each cohort she studied, so that from being a minority at the outset, they disappeared completely from the programme, withdrawing from classes in favour of home study. The remaining girls were convinced this was because 'they don't want to be associated with us'. As a result, in spite of race equality legislation, Black and white working-class pregnant teenagers were being educated separately. Luttrell explored the historical framing of white girls as redeemable, but black girls as irredeemably unruly and deviant, and the tradition of Black supplementary schools. We can see how this pattern plays into the inaccurate depiction of teen motherhood as a Black problem in the USA and the differential representations of white 'good girls who made a mistake' and Black 'Welfare Queens' (Pillow 2004).

The girls' accounts of how the programme differs from mainstream school show gratitude for the most measly of concessions, such as being allowed to take time off for medical appointments or to eat when hungry. Such basic requirements for pregnant women point to the unreasonable inflexibility of the school regime and the firm hold that 'school' has on 'education'. Why need their education be in the form of old-style schooling which some of them had rejected anyway? The very normality of schools restricting eating and drinking can be questioned anew when the body in question draws attention to itself by 'showing' and revealing that it is a pregnant body that is being so disciplined. Human rights discourse applies to the treatment of pregnant women in prison, but not so school-age mothers-to-be where the punitive control is by virtue of their age and the school's 'normal' disciplining of pupils' bodies.

The pregnant body itself provided a site for some teachers to convey negative messages to the girls, albeit implicitly. 'Showing' was a recurrent theme in the conflict described by both teachers and students. When a pregnancy begins to *show*, the pupil's body no longer conforms and moreover, it flaunts their sexual activity. When the girls *show* their pregnant bodies they are deemed to have a 'bad attitude'. Negative messages were communicated indirectly by the physical setting itself which was inadequate and unsuitable. Housed in a long-standing temporary adjunct to the school it had no heating or lift for the two flights the girls had to climb to reach it. When relocated to where there was heating, it was on the periphery of the school grounds with no educational facilities, such as a library, in reach. The desks were of the old-fashioned, wooden type with desk and bench joined, and therefore completely inflexible and barely big enough for some girls to get their pregnant bellies behind. Not only have they 'done wrong', but they themselves, their bodies, *are* wrong.

Pillow (2004) describes a young woman perching uncomfortably for a whole session on the edge of one of these same chair-desks because her three absences that month meant she didn't dare miss another class. This was a classroom specifically for teen mothers yet her body still didn't fit. From this, Pillow develops her analysis of how pregnant/mothering teens do not 'fit', either literally or figuratively into educational research, theories, policy and practices. Paradoxically, these US programmes, established under anti-discrimination legislation to provide equal access to education for pregnant teens, end up further marginalising them: they are excluded from mainstream education, geographically and socially isolated. Furthermore, instead of providing education 'as a right', the culture of these programmes can present it as 'a responsibility' towards their child.

For an earlier generation of women forced to leave education when they became pregnant the problem was not being pregnant, but the school's response (Luttrell 1997), as in Britain. 'Special' provision has not eradicated the problem, but has merely shifted it insidiously onto psychological grounds. Luttrell found this new generation of young women painfully aware of the hierarchies of class, race, gender and age framing their lives and the stigma of teenage pregnancy. Now however, they are bound into meanings of

education which claim to offer their only chance of improvement and redemption whilst at the same time delivering punitive, derogatory messages. Our participants did not seem as politically informed as their US peers, strengthening the hold that individualising discourses of responsibility for economic success might have over them.

Embodied young people and SRE

We now apply these insights to help imagine feminist educational principles for young men and young women that take account of gendered, lusty bodies. Firstly, education need not be in a school or modelled on schooling. Provision could start afresh, learning from the experience of the mother-to-be and not trying to squash her pregnant body and interests into the pupil mould. A model of education might be devised that is flexible enough to fit a young man or woman's life, values and physical health, and attend to local cultures and opportunities rather than assuming the naturalised but particular values of the neoliberal subject. A negotiated curriculum would focus on topics that students themselves identified as relevant. Luttrell calls for more chance for young people to play and to explore moral and identity issues. Attendance could be voluntary and flexible, and life events would be acknowledged and supported, not greeted with frowns for 'interfering with' education. Policy that allowed for this might avoid seeing pregnant or mothering pupils as 'a problem' for education, and an approach to education that lost the baggage of 'schooling' would benefit many pupils not just those 'at risk of exclusion'.

Physical location, timing, structure, and co-presence, could be rethought, certainly to allow the changing requirements of the pregnant– or any other - body to be accommodated. For the young men we interviewed, rethinking the school's strict regulation of the body would be an essential component of an education that worked for them. Lusty and/or pregnant bodies might enjoy moving around more freely for comfort and in the interest of concentration. Reflecting *with* young people on the disciplining of bodies in schools could be an insightful exercise regarding the operation of power.

The mind might not be seen as split from the body, and the body might not be relegated to curricular or cross-curricular margins. This might enable sexuality and nutrition, say, to be high-status topics, integrating academic and practical knowledge. The relative status of academic studies and social and personal education could be rebalanced. Financial and practical knowledge might be valued without lapsing into *cooking-'cos-you're-girls* and *car-maintenance-cos-you're boys* or being limited to 'training'. Indeed devising a relevant curriculum for today's young people could allow the study of social and environmental justice issues and movements to be prioritised appropriately. Dominant social values they may already be aware of negotiating could be central, including sexual double standards, the cultural ambivalence regarding motherhood and sexuality, and the tension between parent and worker identities. Boys and girls could be encouraged to think openly and critically about whether and what types of parenting, partnership and friendship relationships they value and aspire to.

Sexualities education would, of course, challenge normative assumptions about families and parenting that position teenage mothers as marginal and stigmatised and occludes or pathologises same-sex relationships. A pro-active approach would create, not merely wait for opportunities to disrupt hetero-normative presumptions and stereotypes and to acknowledge alternatives, and education for a multi-sexual society would recognise and celebrate sexual diversity as part of the formal *and* informal curriculum (Atkinson 2002). The idealisation of 'good mothers' and denigration of 'bad mothers' could be challenged, as could the 'good girl/bad girl' construction of young women who are active in relation to or conceal their sexual desires, and the 'stud'/'wimp' constructions of young men according to their perceived sexual experience, prowess or endowment. Relational rather than performance aspects of sexual practice could be emphasised. Feminist insights into sexual obligations, duties and hetero-patriarchal institutions have much to offer men as well as women (hooks 2000). Sensitivity would be needed to help some working-class young men identify other currencies to avoid devaluing their only or most prized currency.

Struggles over representation could be explored by students and self-representation activities employed reflexively/therapeutically so as to 'break the gaze' of those who judge, belittle or 'Other' them. Self-representational work could allow young men to think critically about their own investments, their peer group's celebration of hegemonic and denigration of other masculinities and the cost of continually competing with each other, as well as the gendering of power. It could provide an important opportunity for young mothers to manage the self-esteem damage done by the stigmatising of young motherhood. It would engage all young people in reflecting on the identity work they do around race and gender, for instance, including their own Othering practices.

Our main argument about the gendering of social reality – which is a problem when gender-neutral expectations are asserted in education and welfare policies – and the need to re-gender classroom practices and pedagogy are about making policy or classroom practices better match the real world – that is, reflect more accurately socially prevalent ideas about the world that we live by. We recognise the progressive intentions behind attempts to change the world through changing language, and are broadly part of that movement. But we are arguing that interventions need not only to construct aspirational categories as they critique existing ones, but also to recognise that people are already subjects, our hopes and aspirations *produced* through the gendered discourses of our home and local cultures. Feminist critiques of earlier anti-sexist work in schools (Walkerdine 1990; Arnot *et al* 1999) argued that rationalist approaches were not enough and for the need to engage with the gendered ideals of our unconscious fantasies too: the princess and super-hero images populating our imaginations despite any conscious rejection of them. Where so more than in our fantasies about relationships and sex? We need to avoid being over-rationalist in our approaches to promoting safer sexual practice and truly engage with the nature of fantasy in desire if we are ever to 'close the gap' between young people's knowledge and practice of safer sex. Adding in the missing 'discourse of erotics' that young people have

asked for will help raise the status of sex education for young people by relating it more closely to their lived experiences (Allen 2001).

Even if policy cannot, practitioners must engage with boys' talk and girls' talk as the only way to hear and try to meet their agendas and convince them to make our concerns (with STIs or with sex that is later regretted) theirs. The gap between peer culture and SRE practice risks leaving assumptions and myths unchallenged. The young people we spoke with were 'worldly wise' yet admitted they or their friends had believed that 'you can't get pregnant the first time' or that having intercourse standing up prevents conception. When we omit to teach something, we let playground whispers become louder and uncontested (King and Schneider 1999 cf Atkinson 2002).

What does 'getting real about sex' mean for SRE? Direct, explicit and honest discussions of sexual practice, behaviour, feelings and safety that answer young people's questions and respond to their request that SRE is more than 'plumbing and prevention' (Lensky 1990) are essential. This means breaching the niceties of 'polite' culture in public educational settings that in practice evade responsibilities towards young people. All the young people we spoke to saw SRE as 'as important as academic subjects', and were concerned with the quality of teaching, valuing confident, trained, specialist teachers and external speakers for the particular relationship they would develop with them and the confidence this instilled regarding confidentiality. Many studies have now reported that young people want more and earlier SRE and a more detailed and explicit coverage of sex, sexual anatomy, desire and feelings (Measor *et al* 2000; Kehily 2002; Allen 2005; Hilton 2006). Sexual health services that are effective in attracting young people are those that start from young people's needs and wishes rather than from trying to get them into established, adult-centred institutions - schools, hospitals or clinics. What young people repeatedly tell researchers about wanting privacy and confidentiality is taken as axiomatic, so, for instance, it is not necessary to announce publicly a name and reason for attending as is necessary at family planning clinics and NHS Walk-in centres. Instead a young person is greeted and invited into a consulting room before being asked to disclose personal information.

What this successful health-derived model and some of the nurses we interviewed managed to do, which analysis of young people's complaints about sex education identifies (Allen 2005), is construct young people as sexual subjects. This means granting them and encouraging them to develop a sense of sexual agency of the kind that is necessary in order to make decisions likely to promote their sexual health and well-being (Holland *et al* 1998). Within this concept are implicit many of the strands of improved SRE practice that we have highlighted: the recognition of embodiment in differentiated and differently esteemed bodies; of existing knowledge; of varied amounts and types of sexual experience; of varying desires, pleasures and identifications; of varying emotional responses and experiences. If education could do this, then young people's sexuality would be seen as a positive part of youthful identity rather than be framed as a problem (Bay-Cheng 2003; Allen 2005), and therefore as legitimate and important business,

rather than as impeding the proper academic business of the school (Paechter 2004).

Good practice in SRE already has young people comparing the gendering of sexual insults, comparing lists of qualities seen as desirable in a boyfriend and a girlfriend, and comparing the qualities they seek in a friend with those they seek in a lover (Cohen 2000; fpa 2004; Heckert 2005). The result of the latter is usually the valuing of personal qualities such as sensitivity, intimacy, respectfulness, showing care, the reciprocated sharing of joys and vulnerabilities in each case. This brings into focus the psychological qualities of relationships which helps value them more and decentres or critiques the superficial, appearance-based 'relationship' culture epitomised in music videos. Comparing the fantasy sex-lives projected through the commodification of relationships with findings of the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (NATSAL) or the ID Research Sexualities Survey would surely be a useful exercise, even allow teachers under the present system to tick boxes for maths, science, SRE and CE. Of course, avoiding compartmentalising relationships and sexuality in SRE could see them explored through literature or discussions of social change etc and illustrate the range of ways of thinking about them.

The real challenges lie in making responsible teaching about STI risks still 'sex positive' and making sex positivity sensitive to the pressures it can create (Glick 2000), helping young women and young men question some of the gendered 'rules' governing sexual pleasure (Storr 2003), and in making SRE more practical (Wilson 2003). In a thought-provoking discussion of whether SRE can and should include '"hands on" experience rather than only the transmission of biological information and moral precepts' (*ibid.*: 23), Wilson (2003) proposes an 'erotic education' that could apply approaches familiar to PSHE such as role-play to avoid leaving young people 'to struggle with their own sexuality in isolation' (*ibid.*: 26). What this highlights is the step back taken from 'realistic' SRE when compared with other subjects on the curriculum, despite the existence of useful pedagogies that are practical yet 'safe' emotionally and physically (or at least careful). Allen (2004) points to toilet training as another 'private' bodily matter that we don't leave children to learn by trial and error. However, the very notion of 'the private', which sustains liberal society's devaluation of the feminine and exploitation of home-makers and workers under capitalism, can itself be questioned. As Heckert (2005) argues, if young people are encouraged to respect their own desires, listen to those of others, negotiate emotionally-charged relationships, challenge coercion and domination could not these same ethics be applied to all relationships and to question all hierarchies, including, for example, in the family or the workplace.

Each of the young mothers and the young father we interviewed would have liked better SRE, but not necessarily to prevent their 'early' parenting. Reasons to improve SRE include so that young people may better protect their health; respectfully negotiate pleasurable experiences and question norms and pressures, including the gendered expectations of pleasure and performance that young men and women still report (Holland *et al* 1998).

Young people's views and experiences of school in general are important for envisaging an education 'otherwise', or else the wish to promote young people's social and emotional development and their radical empowerment may be seriously limited by the current education system. Young parents' and school non-attenders' experiences of school are of particular note to policy-makers because they reveal how the use of schools to implement a sexual health strategy or reach social inclusion goals may be limited by the teacher-pupil relationships possible within a resource-pressured, attainment-focused system. This evidently does not support the self-esteem of all pupils; and local or peer-group cultures may not share New Labour values regarding the role of paid work for parents or the undesirability of teenage pregnancy.

Governing young people and their sexuality

Drawing on feminist post-structuralist approaches, we have developed an understanding of the experiences of young people in relation to education and located their sometimes gendered aspirations in the context of neoliberalism. Young people do not just *learn* about gender and sexuality as 'out there' in the social world but the meanings and values they have access to are those through which they *produce themselves*. Their expectations, aspirations, desires and their sense of self are formed through constructions including classroom and peer group vogues regarding sexual attractiveness and desirable masculinities and femininities. This highlights the need for the curriculum to support young people in examining critically the normative and alternative discourses of gender, sexuality and relationships available for and already producing their subjectivities.

Interviewing someone indeed invites them to narrate a particular version of subjectivity or personhood. Researchers providing implicit expectations of a self-critical subject who identifies their own failings, but resolves to make good of them (Alldred and Gillies 2002). The research encounter can function as an opportunity for contrition and the acceptance of punishment, and hence for governing the self in line with disciplinary expectations (Marks 1996). The old binary of the educable/ineducable subject echoes in current government rhetoric, transformed through the discourse of training, from which no-one is exempt, but our discomfort with this and intention that the research questioned such constructions was irrelevant to the way the research encounter may have functioned for young people. Merely asking young men and women whether they had plans for returning to education or training mobilises the expectation that they ought to. It reinforces the construction of work as central to adult identities. This offered the chance to occupy the position of 'educable subject' which is productive of a sense of self through education discourse. For those who had 'failed' at school, it offered the chance to position themselves as reformed characters redeeming themselves. This was not our intention, but who were we to think we could step outside the dominant discourse of education and training, or gather accounts 'before' or 'beyond' power (Butler 1990).

Interviewing can be a tool of disciplinary gaze then and sometimes a means of censure: going to see the head-teacher means 'having a talk about it' rather

than the cane these days. Central to the work of Connexions is interviewing young people 'towards' employment or training where the interview is the chance for them to make 'appropriate' choices.

Sex education lessons for professional educators?

Specific, high quality professional training on SRE is essential, as others have argued (e.g. Biddle and Forrest 1997; BMA 1997; Measor *et al* 2000), and indeed the Teenage Pregnancy Report (SEU 1999) urged the Teacher Training Agency to consider whether the ITE curriculum needed changing to reflect this. Specialist PSHE teachers are needed, in our view, to improve the knowledge-base, the pedagogic skills-base, the status of and to help meet young people's requests for more and better SRE. However, this is not enough. Questions from pupils about sexuality and relationships can crop up in any timetable slot and with an ever-lowering age of puberty and sexual experimentation, as Hilton (2003) has argued, SRE needs be on the curriculum for ITE across the board, not only on the curricula for those who expect to teach it (e.g. Science, for SRE, and Social Science, for PSHE). We propose comprehensive input on SRE for all trainee teachers and youth workers so that confidence in responding to young people's questions and interest becomes good practice across all preparation for working with young people. Updates through in-service training could help staff further develop their own communication and self-awareness to the benefit of all their relationships.

We draw from our study the need for education to place more emphasis on the emotions and on the relational aspects of teaching and learning and less on economic and employment agendas. Indeed we see a need for educational researchers and teacher educators to find ways to discuss, without raising the emotional temperature, interpersonal teacher-pupil relations, pleasure in teaching, and ways to prioritise emotional, physical and sexual well-being, not just educational 'success'. Education is not only about academic achievement, but also about developing people's sense of themselves and their identities and values, linking learning and reflection with biographies and feelings, and enabling the development of personal identities and affective states that learning and academic identities rely on. Such issues need to be integrated within the substantive curriculum in individual lessons, as well as, informing a rethink of the whole achievement agenda. We are arguing for a more reflective approach to learning and teaching, conscious of the role of education in society, focusing on what learners want and could gain from education, and in which all teacher education attends social and emotional issues. The New Labour commitment to personalised learning might be seen by some as the vehicle for such a transformation, but its focus on 'choice' and the 'employable subject' would need serious critical scrutiny before and within any such attempt. The reduction of choice to the options current policy provides for choosing, and the material constraints different individuals face would be two areas of contention.

The mental health pressures faced by young people today are reaching the agendas of educators, for instance, through concerns over the increasing

suicide-rate amongst young men, even those who appear to be coping well with academic pressures. Academic, sporting or peer group successes do not ensure they are not struggling with personal or emotional issues. This is where educators must pay close attention to individualised risks and vulnerabilities which young men and women, in their different ways, bear. The need to develop curricula around self-efficacy, self-esteem and emotional literacy is increasingly apparent, as is the need to make more publicly accessible critiques of the 'heterosexual matrix' identified by Judith Butler - and used convincingly in recent education research (Renold 2005; Nayak and Kehily 2006) – and to theorise masculinities/femininities in relation to subject achievement (Davies 2006; Hey 2006). It is here that broader attention to PSHE in ITE will have its second advantage - in the greater confidence all teachers will have in being able to create emotionally supportive environments and hold sensitive discussions with young people about intimate or charged issues.

We want therefore to urge that, in future, education prioritises emotional well-being: it is not 'effective' for schools to produce young people with strings of qualifications at an emotional cost that leaves some of them on the verge of breakdowns. We want also to insist that education is for social and environmental justice too. Indeed it should be about trying to make the world a better place, not just about processing individuals and inculcating qualities useful to the economy or capitalism. We have seen how the heavy emphasis on paid work and the current preoccupation with employment or training even for new parents plays out in young people's lives. Combining paid work and parenting is a juggling act at the best of times, and the emotional investment in parenting only ever increases with the intensification of psychological discourses of childhood (Burman 1994a; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995), so we wholeheartedly support young mothers in wishing to focus on mothering before trying to carry the burden of individual financial self-sufficiency too. Indeed shouldn't all young people be supported in thinking critically about the normative expectations about their lives in policy discourse or their own peer group?

In any case, the gender-neutral worker model neglects the actualities of much parenting, and the normative expectation for these working-class young people that mothers stay at home to look after their children. In the debates we have charted we see the politics of individualism in the extreme: personalised learning for the normative young woman in the classroom; punitive welfare cut-backs for needy young women who are seen as socially irresponsible for not being financially self-sufficient; and financial levers to coerce young men and women onto training courses or into jobs they will flow out of as quickly as they were shunted into. The lives of young mothers cajoled back into education or employment without listening to their preferences or views about their children's needs contrast with those young women who are out-performing boys at GCSE. But even these academically successful young women are later admonished for their over-zealous commitment to work if they do not leave the workforce to have babies at the socially-approved time. Policy debates neglect the work of feminist scholars and activists on the pressures of the 'double shift', the forgotten demand for

24-hour available childcare (Attar 1992; David 2003a), and that women should be able to choose if, when and how to have children. Even feminist success in adding the issue of the work-life balance to the policy agenda has been forgotten, and is constructed as a logical response to the labour market's need to increase the number and reliability of its 'workers' - constructed as gender-neutral again. Feminist work in making gender visible is still necessary, despite the selective uptake and sometimes co-option of feminist discourse.

Finally, we want to question the acceptable role for schools in implementing government policy concerning contested values, in particular to prioritise welfare budget reduction over education. We make a plea for a more compassionate schooling that values relationships above all and therefore questions the reliance on market forces to improve education. A supportive environment would allow committed educators to facilitate young people to see themselves as sexual subjects, recognise the pressures of a culture awash with profit-driven sexual imagery, and to resist the extension of capitalist logic to emotional and sexual relationships. Students learn from the culture of a school as much as from the curriculum content. Schools are delivering their most powerful lessons about relationships and sexuality in the degree to which they respect the diverse bodies, desires and emotions of both teachers and pupils. The real challenge in schools lies in the practice of compassionate relationships that are both sustaining and sustainable.