

Bridging the Gap: Sex Education in Quebec's English Secondary Schools

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**ABSTRACT**

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The purpose of this study was to describe and evaluate Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) sex education program from the perspective of teachers in Quebec's English language high schools. Six teachers from four different schools and three different school boards were interviewed. The teachers spoke about incidents that involved sex education, teenage sexual activity and sexuality related matters that have taken place throughout their careers. The results suggest that there is a definite gap between what MELS expects with regards to sex education and classroom actualities. In particular, the teachers who participated felt that they were ill prepared to teach sex education as they had received little to no training. Furthermore, some were unaware of MELS' expectations.

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The final thank you is for my current and former students. Every day, I get to work with unbelievable young people. They inspire me and motivate me in ways that I never thought possible. I dream big because of them; I work hard because of them; I procrastinate (especially with this thesis) because of them; and above all, I love what I do because of them. The goal in doing this thesis is so that one teeny, tiny aspect of the education system improves in order to keep them safe(r). I truly believe in the next generation(s).

**DEDICATION**

To Fraser, the bear, you make everything better.

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## List of Abbreviations

QEP.....Quebec Education Program

STIs..... Sexually Transmitted Infections

STDs..... Sexually Transmitted Diseases

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

SGA.....Small for Gestational Age

Apps.....Applications

GSA.....Gay Straight Alliance

LGBTQI..... Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersexed

OFSTED..... Office of Standards in Education

PED.....Pedagogical

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Researcher Location

As a young person, my relationship with sex education was a precarious one at best. At home, my parents were of the mind-set that sex was not a bad or dirty thing; however, it was not a subject that they were comfortable with nor was it one that they readily brought up. This is most probably due to the fact that they were both brought up in more repressive households, in a time where emotional dialogue and sexual topics were not embraced nor encouraged. With regards to sexuality, my parents would occasionally talk about homosexuality. The reason for this is that my aunt is a lesbian. In the same breath, these discussions were not in-depth or particularly thought-provoking as my father religiously employs the “you’re okay, I’m okay” philosophy to his daily life. He is not gay and I am not a lesbian so not much more ever needed to be said.

At school, a then Catholic primary school, the message was much clearer: no sex before marriage and heterosexual relationships were the only types of relationships to be recognized. In the fifth and sixth grade, we spoke about relationships, hygiene and skirted around the topic of sex and procreation. My Catholic primary school had a different agenda than other institutions; the above-mentioned repressive, taboo messages that thrived before the 1960s were alive and well.

A similar message was delivered when I entered secondary two. I attended a very diverse, secular secondary school with approximately 2000 students roaming the halls. Our Moral and Religious Education teacher would wait outside the classroom and we would receive peer-led lectures on abstinence. Secondary four and five students would talk about the benefits of abstaining. Unfortunately, we were more preoccupied with

whether or not they had ever had sex and if they had any advice or information about what it was like. Again, I was receiving the message that sex was bad. Moreover, these sessions reinforced the idea that heterosexual relationships were ‘normal’ and accepted.

The year that followed proved to be much more interesting as we learned about birth control, condoms and Sexually Transmitted Diseases ((STDs) now known as Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)). Regrettably, the teacher who taught these subjects was uncomfortable and had her own agenda. She was a bible-thumping, robust woman who resembled a prison warden more than a high school teacher. She gave us pamphlets on birth control and a package of information about STDs. Every lesson, she would go through all the facts and if applicable, she would show a terrifying picture and accompany it with an even more terrifying anecdote. For instance, she showed us a picture of what herpes looks like and then enlightened us with a story about a young lady, who had herpes. When the STD spread all over her body, the young lady became so depressed that she took her own life. This tale reinforced what I had been told by others: sex is bad and it makes you dirty. I didn’t realize it back then but my entire sex education was a series of shock tactics one story/picture/negative impression at a time. The culminating act was the introduction to condom usage. We were given a very large wooden penis and condoms and were then instructed to place the condoms on the gargantuan wooden penises. It was the final straw, their last plea: “girls please be afraid of the penises’ girth and magnitude and boys please develop an inferiority complex as we know your penises do not resemble this whatsoever!” The powers that be were practically begging the next generation not to have sex too early and they were doing this by giving us oversized penises.

Is my late bloomer syndrome due to these tactics? Perhaps. Am I scarred from these experiences? Perhaps. Whatever the case may be, I do feel that I was done a disservice by these methods. None of this 'sex education' acknowledged my humanity. Several years after this, as I started my career as a teacher, I wondered how I would teach sex education, if ever given the opportunity. Moreover, I began to think critically about how I was taught; hence, the above-mentioned anecdotes. However, after a trip to Uganda and some preliminary research on sex education in this developing nation, I did realize that we, in Quebec, are in fact doing our youth a disservice because we are currently doing very little in the area of sex education. In Uganda, there was no avoiding the fact of adolescents' sexuality. It had to be confronted because of AIDS. Clearly, in Quebec and North America, our needs are different from the developing world. However, it does not mean that sex education should be avoided or implemented in a haphazard way.

### **Context**

Over the past two decades, Quebec has seen many changes especially with regards to education. School boards, once separated into Catholic and Protestant institutions, are now linguistically divided. In addition to this, almost twelve ago, the government completely altered the primary and secondary curriculum with the implementation of the Quebec Education Program (QEP). Many professionals in the field saw this as a positive and a progressive move forward as the QEP stresses the importance of competency-based learning and student-centered, constructivist learning environments.

However, program's execution left much to be desired as many topics, including sex education, were left unclear.

In 2003, a document entitled *Sex Education in the Context of Education Reform* was released by the MELS. MELS (Duquet, 2003) clearly outlines the need for sex education in Quebec by highlighting significant issues such as: sexuality, pregnancies, abortions, rape, healthy and unhealthy relationships and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Moreover, MELS also notes that today's children are bombarded with a plethora sexualized images and information from the television, the Internet, family, friends, school, magazines etc. MELS states that what it is most troublesome is that parents did not always discuss this 'found' information as many "feel uncomfortable in this area, and are reluctant to venture into the domain of sexuality for fear of saying too much or of not expressing themselves adequately" (Duquet, 2003, p. 6). Thus, it is up to the children to negotiate meaning and truth from this 'found' information. For these reasons, sex education becomes crucial to a child's personal, social and physical development making the accurate information paramount.

The MELS' document, that was written by many health care and education sector professionals, examines what sex education in Quebec should look like in this day and age. In Quebec, and most Western countries, schools seem to be the most obvious place for sex education to take place as they prove to be "attractive and effective location[s] that most youth regularly attend and are dedicated to increasing students' knowledge and improving their skills"(Smylie, Maticka-Tyndale & Boyd, 2008, p. 26). Furthermore, teachers can be seen as the perfect intermediary with regards to sex information and children. Teachers are role models and "the ongoing relationship that teachers maintain

with students fosters a climate in which simple, frank discussions can take place” (Duquet, 2003, p.34). Duquet (2003) also mentions of involving other health care professionals in this process; however, teachers are seen as the front liners in this activity as they are delivering the information.

Additionally, with the implementation of the QEP and the focus on competency based learning MELS believes that,

it is therefore possible to include the topic of sexuality in the development of certain subject-specific or cross-curricular competencies... For example, in English language arts, a student research project on the prevention of STDs and AIDS could contribute to the competencies “Uses information” or “Uses information and communications technologies.” In taking a position on the topic, students would learn to exercise their critical judgment. In presenting the results of their research, they would be working on their ability to communicate appropriately.(Duquet, 2003. p. 21).

In theory, this seems to be reasonable. In reality, teachers are not broaching the topic as they feel they are unprepared and lack training and thus feel uncomfortable (English Montreal School Board, 2014). Some teachers even feel that they lack time to integrate ‘sex talk’ into their lessons.

School boards and schools are expected to provide teachers with sex education training; especially since the “school administration plays a major role in implementing a concerted approach to sex education in its own establishment” (Duquet, 2003, p.35). Unfortunately, very little training, if any, is given to teachers. Moreover, schools are

reluctant to take a clear stance on sex education. This may be due to several reasons: the sensitive nature of the topic, the diverse cultural make up of schools, money and time. As a result, students are often left in the dark with regards to sex education and healthy relationships.

### **Problem Statement**

As a student and a teacher in Quebec, I have experienced many problems with how sex education is taught. As a student, a variety of ineffective methods were used to dissuade students from sexual intercourse. Teachers skirted around the issues and did not address the many valid questions that the students had. As a teacher, in the QEP era, I see very little clarity in the sex education curriculum and resources from the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS). This has led to a lack of enthusiasm, understanding and knowledge on the part of many of my colleagues. Teachers are currently expected to include sex education in all subjects if and when they see fit. What is problematic about this situation is that many teachers: are unaware of their sex education responsibilities; are not comfortable with the topic; lack training or avoid it. As a result, today's youth, who are constantly exposed to inaccurate and erroneous information from their peers and the media, are being sent out into the world misinformed and unprepared.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to highlight the gap between MELS' sex education expectations and classroom realities. In order to understand the current state of affairs,



teachers from Quebec's English language high schools have been interviewed. During these interviews, the teachers call upon their observations and experiences with sex education.

### **Significance**

This study will contribute to the on-going effort to improve sex education in the Quebec's English language high schools. It has the potential to advance teaching practices and student learning in Quebec. The rationale for this study thus lies in the fact that those of us who work with and teach Quebec's English-speaking youth, are still sending children out into an unsafe world without giving them the coping mechanisms along with accurate information in regards to sex. Ultimately, we can help them make safer and smarter choices.

### **Research Questions**

This qualitative and ethnographic research will answer the following questions:

- 1) What are MELS' expectations for sex education in Quebec?
- 2) What are teachers' accounts of what is being taught with regards to sex education in Quebec's secondary schools?
- 3) What are teachers' perspectives with regards to sex education, teenage sexuality and teenage sexual activity?
- 4) What are teachers currently teaching about sex and health education?

**Limitations**

For the purpose of this study, the following limitations were identified:

- 1) All participants were female
- 2) Only four high schools were represented
- 3) Only three school boards were represented
- 4) Only public schools were represented
- 5) Data was contingent upon the participants' readiness to share their experiences and observations.

## **Chapter Two:**

### **Literature Review**

Sex education is an incredibly important part of any secondary school curriculum as the purpose of sex education is to accurately inform today's youth about sex and hopefully, reduce dangerous sexual behaviour (McKeon, 2006). Unfortunately, people view the need for sex education differently depending on religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation and experience (Jackson, 2013). The situation is compounded as it is not just about sex education but the context in which it may be located varies according to such matters as ethnicity and religion. As a result of not everyone agrees on how to best disseminate sex education and it becomes a highly contentious topic.

Many parents want their children to have a certain outlook on sex, but it does not always coincide with what is being taught in the curriculum. Therefore, curriculum developers and teachers who deliver the subject are often put in a difficult position to meet the demands of the parents; this is especially the case in schools that have diverse populations. For example, Zine (2008) did a study on Muslim students in Ontario and found that they continuously had to strike a balance between what is being taught at home and in school. In addition to this, parents, who took part in this study, worried about their children being swayed in the wrong direction. Not everything that their children learnt at school was at odds with home values or lessons, but there were some discrepancies. Zine (2008) stated that what made matters most difficult was that these young people were also dealing with issues of acceptance, conformity and identity.

Similar studies have also been done with Christian students and parents in the United States. The Christian parents seem to fight the schools or the school boards

(Irvine, 2002). Students were not asked to negotiate meaning from what they learnt at school and home. The parents told them to reject what they did not deem morally sound. One might argue that the United States is very different from Quebec, but in 2006, “The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada [fought] back against the Quebec Ministry of Education, which require[d] that unlicensed evangelical schools follow the provincial curriculum, including sex education and Darwin's theory of evolution” (Canwest News Service, 2006). Thus it is clear that parents do not always agree with what is being taught to their children.

This review of the literature is divided into four sections. (1) The first section explores why schools are the best venue for sex education to take place. Moreover, it explores the potential that schools have to provide a safe student for all students especially those who belong to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersexed (LGBTQI) community. (2) The second section delves into the importance of and the need for sex education in schools. This section concerns itself with the reality of the situation and the many risks associated with sex such as, teenage pregnancies; the spread of sexually transmitted infections and the murky matter associated with sex and advanced technology. (3) The third section explores the various teaching methods that may be advocated with the focus on discussions of ineffective and effective sex education teaching practices. (4) The fourth section reviews what is documented with regards to what is happening today with sex education in Canada, particularly, Quebec. The review of the literature will end with a brief conclusion of main points and highlights questions require further exploration and discussion in subsequent parts of the thesis.

## **Section One: Schools and Safe Spaces**

### **Why are schools the best venue for sex education to take place?**

Although some parents are adamantly against sex education in schools and some find it in opposition to what is being taught at home, the majority of parents in the western world want their children to receive sex education (Walker, 2007). Schools are the ideal platform to reach the masses, as the majority of 5- 17 year olds attend school in North America (Kirby, 2010; Walker, 2007). Furthermore, research by Mueller, Gavin, and Kulkarni (2007) suggest that school-based sex education programs may reduce teenage sexual risk behaviour. Moreover, they suggest that males and females are more likely to postpone their first sexual encounter if they are exposed to some type of sex education.

In school, teachers, nurses and other professionals such as guidance counsellors are able to inform students about sex in an effective manner. With regards to Quebec's teachers Duquet (2003) states that,

Teachers stand in the forefront of any implementation of sex education in the schools as they are well positioned to make connections among the situations they witness in the classroom and in the school, the subject- specific learning and the sociosexual and biological realities to which the students are exposed (p.34).

This is provided that teachers are given the proper sex education training and are able to pair said training with their pedagogical training in order to disseminate information in an effective way.

In addition to this, schools are a good venue as some parents are not comfortable talking about sex with their children. Walker (2007) did a study with parents in the

United Kingdom and reported that parents: "... [did not have] awareness of the issue; had uncertainty of the subject; [felt] embarrassed; [were unable] to provide the expected 'sex talk'; lack[ed] of confidence, poor self-efficacy and poor communication skills" (p.242) when talking about sex with their children. This is not to say that sex education should only be taught in schools but the need for it in schools is very evident. At school, the topic can be introduced. While at home, the topic can be discussed from whatever angle the parents deem appropriate, if they choose to discuss it at all.

### **Schools can Provide a Safe Space**

Given the diverse make-up of Quebec's classrooms, it is important that school administrators and teachers consider ethnicity, culture, language, religion and sexual orientation when teaching sex education. When students enter a classroom, they are accompanied by their own beliefs, values and experiences. Some students are being raised in very strict households where they are expected to wait to have sex when they are married, while others may be questioning their sexuality. Consequently, teaching sex education becomes a complex issue that needs to be handled with great care.

One way to ensure sensitivity with regards to sex education is to create a safe space. The term safe space is a term that is often used in schools. It can be defined as, "an environment in which everyone feels comfortable expressing themselves and participating fully, without fear of attack, ridicule, or denial of experience" (My GSA, 2015). When teaching sex education, it is vital that a safe space is created so that students feel comfortable. Safe spaces are important for all students, particularly for students who are part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersexed community

(LGBTQI). For example, research show that LGBTQI students often face verbal and physical abuse and are more likely to have issues with depression and suicide (Center for Disease Control, 2014).

According to the Center for Disease Control, part of creating a safe space could involve having a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) in one's school. A GSA can be defined as "a student-run group that provides a safe place for any and all students to meet and learn about all different orientations, to support each other while working together to end homophobia" (My GSA, 2015). However, safe spaces and GSAs are dependent on several factors including teacher and student participation; teacher-student relationships; comfort level; class and school dynamics.

## **Section Two: Risky Business**

### **Teenage Pregnancies**

Duquet (2003) states that talking about teenage pregnancy and the issues that surround it should be something that is discussed in Quebec's secondary classrooms. Koh (2013) discusses the importance of preventing teenage pregnancy and states that it "should rank as a major priority, due to the pressing emotional, social, health, and financial consequences for both parents and their children" (p.51). Although, Koh is speaking from an American perspective, where teenage pregnancy is a greater problem, the concerns are similar in Canada.

According to Nordberg, Delva, and Horner (2014), pregnancies, in general, cost Canadian taxpayers billions of dollars; therefore, from a simply pragmatic standpoint, teenage pregnancy and teenage parenthood should be prevented as it costs taxpayers money. If we shift the focus from the collective to the individual it is clear that

teenage pregnancies and teenage parenting are not ideal situations. Several studies (Norberg et al. 2014) show that teenagers who fall pregnant tend to be ill prepared for parenthood and have problems from before conception. Norberg et al (2014) state that, “teen mothers were more likely to have low socioeconomic status, be non-immigrant, have no partner, reside in the prairies, have experienced physical or sexual abuse, and would have preferred to have had their pregnancies later in life” (p. 212). Moreover, there are more problems with teenage mothers’ babies at birth. For instance, “government reports about the health of Canadians indicate that mothers younger than 20 years are associated with the highest rate of “small for gestational age” (SGA). SGA babies are born with a birth weight below the 10th percentile” (Nordberg et al., p. 212). According to Stanford Children’s Health (2015), SGA babies are at risk of having the following problems at birth:

Decreased oxygen levels; low Apgar scores (an assessment that help identify babies with difficulty adapting after delivery); Meconium aspiration (inhalation of the first stools passed in utero), which can lead to difficulty breathing;  
Hypoglycemia (low blood sugar); difficulty maintaining normal body temperature; Polycythemia (too many red blood cells).

Teenage pregnancies in Canada are relatively low. According to Statistics Canada (2013), in 2011, teenage births (mothers 19 years old and younger) only accounted for 3.58% of Canadian births. According to Nordberg et al (2014), there are major regional variations where adolescents from rural areas are at a disadvantage, as they do not have access to all resources when they fall pregnant. Teenagers residing in the greater areas of Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal have more options.

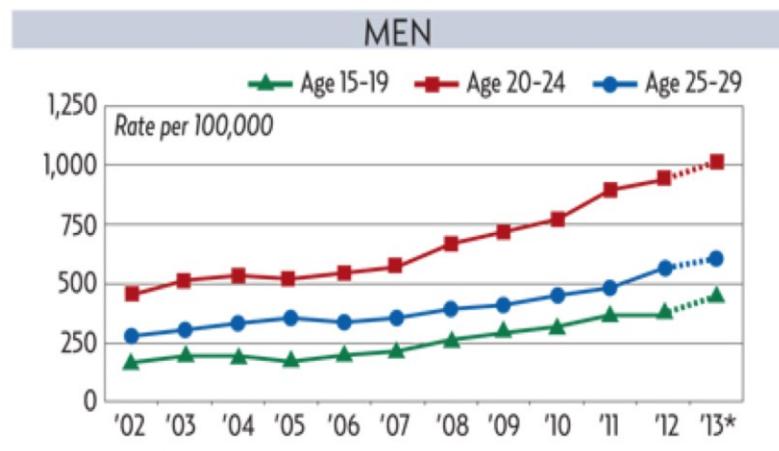


Although, the statistics of teenage pregnancy in Canada are lower than elsewhere, teenagers are still falling pregnant. If they are located in metropolitan area, abortions and morning after pills are readily available. However, these approaches to rid oneself of an unwanted pregnancy are Band-Aid solutions to an over arching problem: why are teenagers falling pregnant? Why are they not protecting themselves? And whether they have knowledge of STIs?

### **STIs**

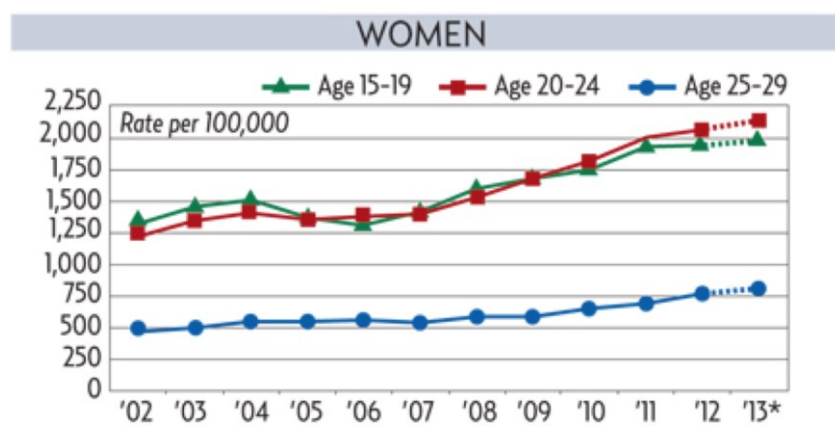
Much like teen pregnancy, Sexually Transmitted Infection (STIs) rates vary according to the region of Canada. Unfortunately, the statistics are not completely reliable as they only represent the test results of those who are tested for STIs. Sexuality and U (2010) report that they “don’t know exact numbers but it’s likely that up to 5% or more of young women in their late teens and early 20s are infected with chlamydia.” Chlamydia and gonorrhoea rates in Quebec are equally alarming. Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate a steady incline in Quebec’s chlamydia rates from 2002 until the first 222 days of 2013.

**Figure i. Chlamydia Rates for Men in Quebec from 2002-2013**



(English Montreal School Board, 2014)

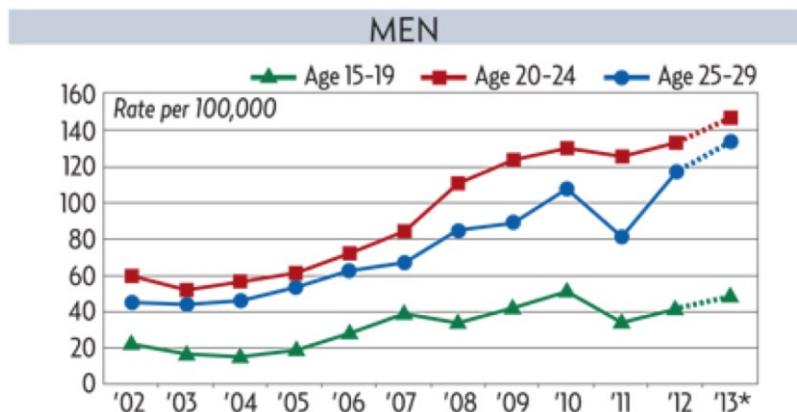
**Figure ii. Chlamydia Rates for Women in Quebec from 2002-2013**



(English Montreal School Board, 2014)

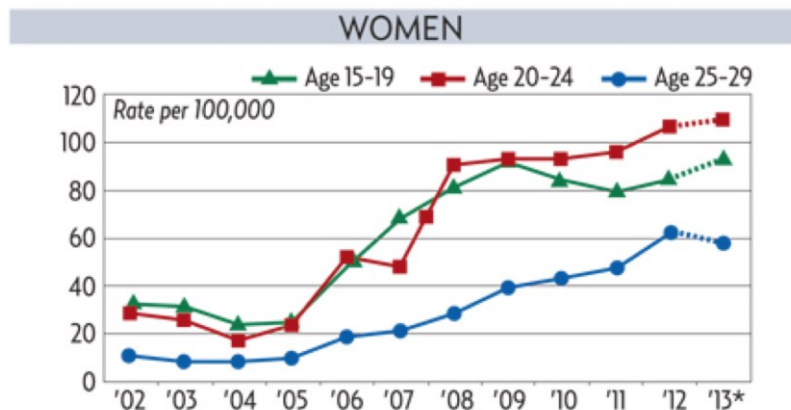
Similarly, Quebec's gonorrhea rates have also increased since 2002. Figures 3 and 4 demonstrate an overall increase in the province's gonorrhea rates.

**Figure iii. Gonorrhea Rates for Men in Quebec from 2002-2013**



(English Montreal School Board, 2014)

**Figure iv. Gonorrhea Rates for Women in Quebec from 2002-2013**

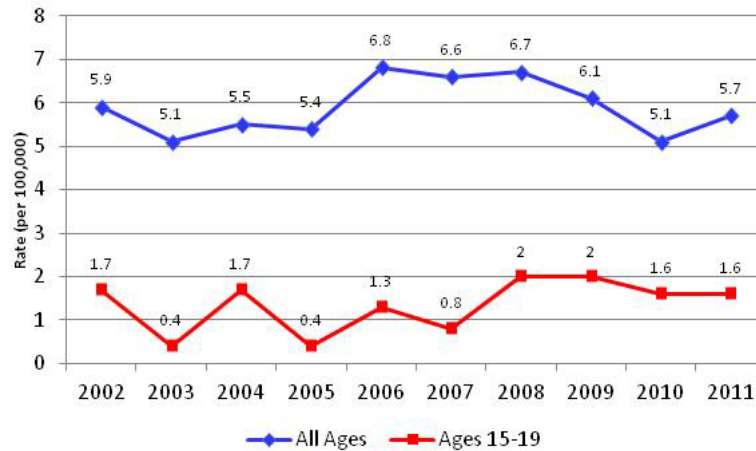


(English Montreal School Board, 2014)

Both of these STIs can be quite detrimental to a person's health and well being if not treated properly and quickly. For example, chlamydia and gonorrhea can cause permanent damage to the uterus and fallopian tubes and leave a woman unable to fall pregnant (Center for Disease Control, 2014).

Other STIs like HIV and AIDS are life threatening and teenagers are very much at risk. Figure 5 depicts HIV rates in Alberta from 2002-2011.

**Figure v. Alberta HIV Rates (All Ages and Ages 15-19) of Newly Reported Cases  
2002-2011**



(Government of Alberta, 2012; Alberta Health and Wellness, 2009)

Once again, the statistics only tell part of the story as they only represent those who get tested for STIs and HIV. All of the figures highlight the fact that teenagers are putting their physical health at risk when they engage in sexual activity.

### **Sex in a Digital Age**

In addition to STIs, teenagers also have the added challenge of living in a digital age. The dangers that lie behind a computer screen or a cellular phone are vast and varied. The Internet and smartphones are seen as a forum where teenagers can seek out information including information on sex, relationships and explicit material that is often highly influential and in some cases incorrect on susceptible young minds.

Teenagers often turn to their peers and the Internet for information pertaining to sex; both can be highly inaccurate. In *Adolescents' use of the Internet for Sex Education: A Thematic and Critical Review of the Literature*, Simon and Daneback (2013) state that

in this technologically advanced age, adolescents tend to turn to the Internet for information on aspects of their lives, especially for health information, because it is easy to use, accessible and seemingly anonymous. Unfortunately, this is a relatively young topic and the research on it is somewhat limited. However, some studies suggest that up to 76.5% of young people are seeking sex information on the Internet (Simon and Daneback, 2013). Moreover, the topics that they are searching include, but are not limited to, from sexually transmitted infections to relationship issues. Simon and Daneback (2013) conclude by stating that the Internet and other technologies have become an important part of sex education.

Maticka-Tyndale (2008) states that there is “an entirely new language and culture of communication has developed for text messaging and chat rooms”(p. 86). The Internet and cellular phones are difficult for many young people to navigate as they encounter explicit material and risky situations that can influence them in a negative way.

### **Teenagers and Sexting**

Cellular phones allow teenagers to be more risky with regards to sexual behaviours. Teenagers send salacious messages and take scandalous selfies (a photo of oneself), belfies (a photo of one’s buttocks) and an array of photos in compromising positions. The photos do not just stay on their phones; young people and adults send out these photos on different applications (apps) for their partners, potential partners, friends and strangers to see. Unfortunately, these photos with the introduction of social media, such as Facebook and Instagram these photos rarely stay private.

Over the past decade, with the increased use of technology, sexting has become an ongoing problem especially with regards to teenagers. According to Wastler (2010), sexting can be defined as “the transmission of sexually explicit photos via text message”(p.687). This definition is limited in that it does not include the transmission of sexual messages that can accompany the sexually explicit pictures. Research on these messages is limited, as more attention has been placed on the legality surrounding minors sending and distributing sexually explicit photos of themselves or their peers and or strangers.

Teenagers’ sexting has been widely deliberated in the United States. From a legal standpoint, there is debate as to whether or not it is considered child pornography. Moreover, there are many instances where law enforcement was involved. An instance of this that Wastler (2010) discusses is when the District Attorney of Wyoming County, George Skumanick, contacted over 20 teenagers’ parents because they were in possession of or were the subjects in sexually explicit materials. Skumanick gave them two options: take part in an educational program or face criminal charges. This is just one instance but the United States is not alone in dealing with the legality of minors’ sexting. Here, in Quebec, there have been many instances where teenagers have been caught in similar predicaments.

In 2013, ten boys from Laval were arrested for possession and distribution of child pornography. Two of the boys were even charged with producing child pornography (CBC News, 2013). McGill professor, Shaheen Shariff, felt that the punishment did not fit the crime considering that the boys are minors and first time

offenders (CBC News, 2013). One can argue that the court is trying to come down hard on these boys to set an example and discourage others from following in their footsteps. The court might also want to prevent other negative occurrences that are associated with sexting. Many young people use sexting to blackmail one another (Sustaita & Rullo, 2013). Young couple sends a few pictures then they break up and one uses it against the other. There have been instances where young people have committed suicide as a result of nude pictures being distributed. Although severe and very infrequent, Strassberg, McKinnon, Sustaita & Rullo (2013) suggest that blackmail and suicide “illustrate, at least, the end point of a continuum of possible psychosocial risks associated with sexting” (p.17). This is a very important area that needs further research however it is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Albury (2014) discusses the dangers that are associated with technology and the effects of pornography consumption on adolescents. Many argue that pornography is damaging as it influences the way young people view relationships, power and sex. On the other hand, Albury (2014) also states that there might be a difference between what people are viewing and how they are actually behaving and suggests that critical thinking, particularly with regards to porn, be added to comprehensive sex education programs. Conversely, as Albury (2014) points out, talking about pornography with minors presents another controversial set of problems; however, so does avoiding the topic. So how should it be taught? What is the best approach to sex education?

### **Section Three: Worst and Best Practices**

#### **Don't Do it! Abstinence-only, an Ineffective Approach**

The abstinence-only approach to sex education demands that teenagers postpone sexual involvement, ideally until they are married. This approach also tends to advocate that 'abstinence [is] the 'only morally correct option' of sexual expression for teenagers" (Advocates for Youth, 2001). There are several issues with this approach. First of all, it does not give adolescents all the information that they need on sex. They may not know what risky behaviour is. Therefore, they do not have all the facts if they engage in risky behaviour. Second of all, studies show that abstinence-only sex education programs do not reduce STIs and teenage pregnancy. Moreover, abstinence-only programs do not delay a person's 'sexual debut' (Kohler, et al., 2008). Thirdly, one of the most frightening aspects with regards to the abstinence-only approach is that, "preteens and teens who receive abstinence-only education may engage in higher risk behaviors once they initiate sexual activity" (Kohler, Manh, & Lafferty, 2008, p. 350). For instance, a teenager might, at one point, subscribe to the abstinence-only approach during their early teens but decide to have sex later on. When they decide to have sex they have a tendency to not protect themselves with condoms or birth control. This approach is hetero-centric and leaves many gay or lesbian teenagers who want to explore sex and sexuality feeling excluded or shamed (Alberta Health Services; Elia & Eliason, 2010). It also leaves a feeling of shame amongst teenagers who have tried or want to try experimenting with sex. This approach also denies that teenagers are human beings, who have sexual feelings. Moreover, it does not tell teenagers what they are supposed to do with these feelings



other than deny them. Providing teenagers with the abstinence-only approach leaves them unaware of the physical, emotional and social risks that are associated with sex.

### **Tell Them What They Need to Know with a Comprehensive Approach**

The comprehensive approach to sex education is all encompassing as it: teaches about abstinence as the best method for avoiding STDs and unintended pregnancy, but also teaches about condoms and contraception to reduce the risk of unintended pregnancy and of infection with STDs, including HIV (Advocates for Youth, 2001). It also teaches interpersonal and communication skills and helps young people explore their own values, goals, and options (Advocates for Youth, 2001).

This approach discusses all the options that are available to teens with regards to sex. Moreover, it allows them to create and explore their own sexual identity. It is not as exclusive as the abstinence approach and it gives teens more than one option with regards to sex. Furthermore, there seems to be a decreased risk of pregnancy among youth who received a comprehensive sex education (Kohler et al., 2008). Additionally, teens that receive a comprehensive sex education were more likely to use condoms when sexually active (Kohler et al., 2008).

## **Section Four: Canada and Quebec**

### **Canada**

Education is a provincial responsibility; therefore, the federal government has little influential over sex education in the schools. However, in 2008, the Public Health Agency of Canada released a Revised Edition of the 2003 *Canadian Guidelines for*

*Sexual Health Education*. This comprehensive document stated that it is “not intended to provide specific curricula or teaching strategies. This document provides a framework that outlines principles for the development and evaluation of comprehensive evidence-based sexual health education” (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008, p. 2). This document is not strictly for those working with adolescents; there are sections devoted to the sexuality of seniors, people with disabilities, street youth and those deemed sexual minorities. It is a useful and informative document that gives an overview on how sex education can be approached. Canadian professionals, such as teachers, social workers and school administrators, are encouraged to use the document but it is not mandated. Ultimately, every province teaches sex education in its own way.

## **Quebec**

The MELS’ approach to sex education has left teachers confused and many of Quebec’s youth in the dark with regards to safe sexual behaviour. In 2003, MELS published a comprehensive document entitled *Sex Education in the Context of Education Reform*. The document reads like an instructional manual and is intended for teachers and those who work in complementary educational services. It outlines which sexual health topics should be covered, with regards to sex, throughout a child’s primary and secondary education. The document also lists ways in which different subjects can broach this controversial topic as “sex education is no longer associated with a single subject or a single educator, and has now become the responsibility of a group of partners” (Duquet, 2003, p.57,). This holistic approach includes all adults who interact with the teenagers and sex education, therefore, becomes a responsibility of the child’s entire adult

community. Unfortunately, many parents, teachers and community members do not know about this new responsibility, even though the curriculum is nearly 12 years old. Furthermore, many school boards and schools have not taken a firm stance actually including sex education. Consequently many adolescents are paying the price.

In 2008, another document *Sex Education in Schools: Yes, But How?* was released as a guide to understanding *Sex Education in the Context of Education Reform*. The guide stresses the need for an understanding of the policy framework, mobilizing a school team and ensuring the coordination of the process (Duquet, 2008). This document's aim is to:

support the education system in implementing a process for sex education that is consistent with the policy framework. In fact, many schools, although they are convinced of the need to establish such a process, are still searching for concrete means to put it into practice. It was to meet this need that this tool was created (4). Obviously, there were some major issues with Duquet's (2003) initial document *Sex in the Context of Education* and the new approach to sex education in Quebec. For instance, schools did not know how or what to implement with regards to sex education. *Sex Education in Schools: Yes, But How?* is to serve as a guide and it asks many pertinent questions with regards to implementing an effective sex education program by creating a sex education committee within the school community. Unfortunately, not many schools seem to be doing this, teachers are unaware and little seems to have changed since 2008. CTV News discussed the topic in February 2013 and stated that "a growing number of sex educators, teachers and doctors say the Education Ministry has dropped the ball and sexually curious teenagers are paying the price" (CTV News, 2013).

Furthermore, in November 2014, the lack of sex education was a topic of discussion for the Montreal Gazette and Celine Cooper, special contributor to the Gazette, wrote an opinion article on sex education and stated, “Under the 2005 education reform, the government annulled formal sexual education in the province’s secondary schools and encouraged teachers to integrate sex education into core subjects” (Cooper, 2014). Unfortunately, this statement is only partially correct as sex education is to be integrated in all subjects but is entirely up to the teachers’ discretion. This leaves the general public wondering what is going on in Quebec’s schools? What resources are available to Quebec’s teachers?

Quebec’s teachers have numerous resources that they can use provided that they have the time and support to use them. There are a variety of Internet sources that teachers can use and teachers can also turn to different local organizations. For instance, Head and Hands is a notable example of a Montreal based organization that has been around since the 1970s and helps people with a variety of issues, including sexual health. Head and Hands offers The Sense Project sex education program, that gives resources and workshops to individuals aged 12 to 25 years old and people who work with adolescents. The workshops vary depending on the needs and wants of the group, who they are working with. For instance, they give talks about safe sex practices, sexuality, sexually transmitted diseases, healthy relationships and more.

Teachers can use Internet sources and local organizations but the expectations need to be clear and training needs to be given. Lisa Trimble, a professor at McGill University sums it up quite nicely, “asking everyone to teach it, though appealing in theory, is ensuring that no one does...sex education in Quebec schools is either non-

existent or completely random...But (the government) doesn't understand that teachers need training and to develop comfort in teaching this" (English Montreal School Board, 2014).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, sex education is a very controversial topic. Although teaching it in schools poses a few problems, it is the most effective as it reaches the masses. If teachers are trained to teach sex education, they will be able combine sex education with their pedagogical training to disseminate accurate information. It is important for this information to be disseminated as the research shows that adolescents are dealing with the consequences of risky sexual behaviour: pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and the many risks that are involved with the Internet and cellular phones. In schools, the best teaching approach with regards to sex education is a comprehensive one because it gives all the factual information, different options and approaches to sex and allows for teenagers to question their values and identity. Although, there is an established approach to sex education in Quebec, it leaves a lot to be desired as many school boards, schools and teachers are unaware of how to implement it. As a result, sex education is not being taught in an effective manner and adolescents in Quebec are being left in the dark. More research needs to be done with regards to why teens turn to sexting and messaging strangers about sexuality. Do teens feel that they do not have a safe space where they can talk about sex? Are school boards, schools and teachers doing what they can to provide a safe space? Do teachers and school administrators know that they need to provide for teens in Quebec with regards to sex education?

## **Chapter Three: Methods**

### **Methodological Approach**

This case study is ethnographic and qualitative. It is ethnographic in that it studies a specific group of individuals: teachers, who teach in Quebec's English Language High Schools. The study is qualitative in nature as it strives to capture teachers' experiences with sex education and teenage sexual activity in Quebec's English Language High Schools. The ideological and philosophical framework of this research is founded in constructivism. Mertens (2005) states that a person's reality is socially constructed; moreover, that multiple realities are constructed and are susceptible to change. This ideological stance adheres to the goal of this research in that this study hopes to shed light on the gap between MELS' sex education expectations and teachers' realities. This study is simply a glance at six teachers' experiences within the same system and seeks to illuminate the similarities and differences within multiple realities in order to help better a faulted system.

### **Recruitment**

Participants for this study took part on a voluntary basis. The sample was purposive. Recruitment emails and Facebook messages were sent to friends, acquaintances and former and current colleagues (see Appendix A) The criterion for participating in the study was the following: a person who is a Quebec Certified Teacher (holds a Brevet/ Quebec Teaching Permit) and is currently teaching in an English high school in Quebec. Potential participants were told that the purpose of the study was to understand teachers' perspectives on sex education in Quebec's English language

secondary schools (see Appendix B). As the QEP is meant to be cross-curricula subject matter for each teacher-participant was not of relevance. The goal of the study was to highlight different teachers' understanding of sex education in Quebec.

## **Participants**

The six teachers who participated in the study were all female. Their teachable subjects varied including: English; Dance; Math; Geography; History and Physical Education. The experience of the teachers varied as well. The most seasoned teacher had 26 years teaching experience and the most novice teacher was only in her third year of teaching. The culture and locations of the high schools where the participants work ranged from rural and racially homogenous (Caucasian) to suburban and affluent to urban and very multi-cultural. All participants were given a pseudonym to preserve their anonymity.

**Mary.** Mary has just less than three years teaching experience. She teaches different subjects. She teaches secondary one to secondary five. She is heavily involved with extra-curricular projects at her school. Her school is located in a Montreal suburb, about 15 minutes from Montreal. The population of her school is diverse.

**Emma.** Emma is finishing her sixth year of teaching. She has taught core subjects to secondary one students for the past few years. In the past, she has taught a variety of subjects to students in secondary one through five. She is very involved in her school community. She organizes and runs a variety of school activities. Her school is located in a Montreal suburb, about 30 minutes from Montreal. The population of her school is only somewhat diverse. There are many Francophones, with English eligibility, who

attend her school. Emma has done research, at a graduate level, on sex education in Quebec.

**Lydia.** Lydia has five years teaching experience. She teaches a core subjects to at-risk students who are in secondary one to secondary three. She coaches a variety of sports teams. The population of her school consists of students who have been flagged as at-risk in regards to their behavior and academic results.

**Jane.** Jane is in her seventh year of teaching. She has taught primary and secondary school. She teaches a variety of subjects. She is very involved in school life including her school's GSA. Her school is located in a rural area, about one hour away from Montreal. The population of her school is homogenous.

**Charlotte.** Charlotte is the most seasoned teacher in this study. She has been teaching for 26 years. She teaches one subject to senior students in secondary four and five. Her school is diverse and is about 15 minutes from Montreal.

**Elizabeth.** Elizabeth is in her seventh year of teaching. She teaches one subject to students in secondary one to secondary five. She coaches sports teams and helps organize school trips. Her school is located on the island of Montreal but it is about 30 minutes away from the city-center. The population of her school is affluent and homogenous.

## **Setting**

Interviews took place in the participants' homes or coffee shops. For contract teachers it was very important that the interviews did not take place at their places of work, as they did not want their participation in the interview to hinder their job security



or their employers' opinion of them. Permanent teachers did not seem to care where the interviews took place.

## **Procedures**

**Data collection.** This qualitative ethnographic case study looks at sex education in English language high schools. The ethnographic approach whereby “human behavior and the ways in which humans construct and make meaning of their worlds and their lives are highly variable and locally specific” (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010) corresponds with one of the goals of this study which was not to find a generalizable truth but to find similarities between participants and explore their experiences within the same system. Another goal of this study is to highlight the gap between MELS' expectations and what is actually being taught in Quebec's English language high schools. This study focuses on teachers, as they are the ones who deliver the curriculum and the ones who spend their days with Quebec's teenagers. The teachers, in the case study, can be viewed as members within a very specific community (English language high schools in Quebec).

**Interview Guide.** Open-ended interview questions were created based on this case study's research questions with MELS' sex education expectations in mind. An example of this is the following question: “What are MELS expectations with regards to sex education?” This type of question allowed for the participants to demonstrate whether or not they understood what the ministry expects of them. Questions like this help demonstrate whether or not teachers are up-to-date on curriculum. The literature shows that not all teachers know what is expected of them with regards to sex education;

therefore, this type of question keeps it open-ended and non judgmental (see Appendix C).

Sexual activity questions allowed teachers to talk about their observations and experiences regarding their students' sexual activity. Examples of sexual activity questions that all participants were asked are, "From your experience, how sexual active do you think the students are?" and "Have students come to you with questions about sex/sexuality? If so, what type of questions do they ask?" These types of questions allowed for the researcher to find similarities between participants. Follow-up questions concerning teenagers' use of technology were sent via email to the participants. However, only three participants responded to the follow up questions.

**Data Analysis.** The purpose of this case study is to describe what is going on (or not going on) with regards to sex education in English language high schools in Quebec. This qualitative research draws on an inductive process in which themes and categories emerge through analysis of data collected by using in-depth interviews as a primary technique. Rossman and Rallis (2003) stress that while conducting research, it is very important to "systematically [organize collected data] materials into salient themes and patterns; bringing meaning so the themes tell a coherent story; and writing it all up so that others can read what you have learned"(p.270). This coincides with the purpose of the study which is to find similarities between participants. Moreover, to draw out interesting stories that demonstrate current occurrences with regards to teenagers and sex in Quebec. Rossman and Rallis (2003) also state that analysis begins "at the same time a study does- at the conceptualization stage"(p.270). The interview questions were

created with this and MELS' expectations in mind. As a result, identifying patterns and coding were made easy. The themes emerged from the answers given from select questions.

### **Trustworthiness**

Rossmann and Rallis (2003) state that the ultimate goal when doing any type of research is to help improve whatever situation the research is focused on. However, in order for any research to be useful or helpful, it must be trusted. Rossmann and Rallis (2003) state that there are a variety of ways in which a researcher can ensure credibility and rigor. Two strategies were used during this study.

The first strategy that was used was “participant validation” this study allowed the participants to look over the interview transcripts and in the words of Rossmann and Rallis (2003) “elaborate, correct, extend or argue about [the findings]” (p.69). In most cases, original transcripts were maintained with a few changes. Only two participants edited their transcripts and made changes with respect to sentence structure and word choice.

The second and final strategy that was employed in order to ensure credibility was the “Using a Critical Friend” approach. Throughout this entire process, I would ask my friend Heather to look over my research, my interview questions and my findings in order to keep me objective. I also would ask my sister-in-law, Krista, both are teachers and have completed a Master's Degree. Moreover, they are participant editors.

However, what is most important to note in regards to the trustworthiness of this study is the fact that they participants were willing to share their stories and experiences.

Contextually, they are very important and their experiences are significant because the participants are part of the education system. Together, they create a very purposeful sample.

## **Chapter Four: Results**

### **Overview of Findings**

This study aims to provide a greater understanding of sex education in Quebec's English high schools. The focus is on secondary teachers who deliver the curriculum to Quebec's English-speaking youth. The results describe their perceptions, observations and experiences inside and outside of the classroom.

### **The Want and Need for Sex Education: Observing Teenage Sexual Activity**

The literature review gives an overview of the risks that are associated with teenage sexual activity and the culminating objective is to establish a need for sex education. Throughout the interviews the participants agreed that there is a definite need for sex education in Quebec's classrooms. All of the participants noted that many of their students were engaging with some type of sexual activity. For instance, when Lydia, whose experience has been primarily with students in secondary one to secondary three, was asked how sexual active she thought the students were, she responded,

Unfortunately I have met more than a few students who have entered that world far too early. They seem to be in a rush to grow up.

When asked the same question, Mary, a teacher of secondary one to secondary five commented on the difference between the students' ages and their sexual activity.

I know that I have students as young as 13, who are currently sexually active. In my senior classes, there are most definitely many students that are sexually active, but I do believe that there are still a large number of students that are not.

Elizabeth, who has taught secondary one to five stated that all students, even those in elementary, need sex education. She stated that many of her students are making very bad decisions without it:

During my first year teaching, the students [who were between 14 to 16 years old] had sex parties where the girls wore different coloured bracelets. The different colours corresponded to different sexual acts. Some were innocent like kissing and others were like blow jobs, anal sex etc. The girls would wear multiple bracelets and the boys would close their eyes and grab one. Then, the girls had to perform the “chosen act”. Girls, who were in grades 9 and 10, put themselves in risky situations by attending these parties. One girl contracted herpes. Another girl fell pregnant and had to have an abortion. She was in my class. The administration tried to hide the story because they didn’t want it to tarnish the reputation of the school.

The participants were asked to talk about what they have observed with regards to their students’ sexual activity, but they were also asked if the students had approached them with questions about sex. All six participants had been asked about sex in some manner. Most of the participants had experiences similar to Emma:

They typically ask about contraception and where they can get it. They are often concerned about doing so through the school because they think their parents will find out. Junior students usually ask if it’s normal for their partner to do a certain thing, or they share stories about their friends and ask for advice.

The questions that students asked Jane were different and slightly more specific:

How do I know if I am in love? How do I know if I am gay? Why do porn stars ejaculate so much? How old should I be when I have sex? Should I text or snap chat the picture he is asking for? Should I wear two condoms? How does the pill work? Will it protect me from STIs? What is an STI? Is AIDS curable?

The most unsettling answer that was given, when asked if students had asked her questions about sex, was from Elizabeth. She gave a specific example where her students had brought a very difficult sexual situation to her attention:

Grade 11 girls came to me and told me that they had been going to parties and bars and getting very drunk. Some would even black out. One girl blacked out and a boy had sex with her. He then went to her best friend and slept with her at the very same party, the same night. Those girls were later asking if they should get tested for an STD. I brought it to guidance, as it was a terrible situation as the girl had essentially been raped. She chalked it up to a bad experience and did not press charges.

When asked if their students wanted sex education, all six participants answered yes.

Emma stated that her students,

...Definitely want sex education. They get varying information from different sources: friends, parents, and the media. This information or advice is not always the best or most objective...

Based on participant responses, the need and want for sex education in Quebec English high schools is evident. Moreover, this section delves into what participants have witnessed with regards to teenage sexual activity. What has not been established: is whether or not teachers are aware of MELS' sex education expectations and if so, how and when during their teaching, to implement them.

### **MELS' Sexpectations**

Before delving into what is going on in English language high schools, it is important to establish whether or not the participants are aware of what MELS's expects from them with regards to sex education. MELS expects all teachers to address sex education in some way as it is part of the cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning (Duquet, 2008). Unfortunately, the participants' knowledge of MELS' expectations varied with some having no information, while others were quite aware but not necessarily implementing it. Surprisingly, two participants were completely unaware. For instance, Charlotte responded, "I have absolutely no idea" and Lydia stated, "I'm not sure."

Mary, Emma and Jane had a better understanding of MELS' expectations. Jane stated,

That all teachers should be able to answer questions with regards to sex and sexuality as they come up in class...

This statement is only partially accurate as there is a section in the 2003 document *Sex Education in the Context of Education Reform* that lists different topics that should be



addressed with children, at varying ages. Moreover, the document gives suggestions on how different subjects can broach the different topics. Mary touches upon this when she states that,

MELS believes that it is the responsibility of every educator to teach sex education within the context of his or her own course.

Emma is the only participant who gives a detailed account of MELS' expectations.

The expectations are that this topic will be covered cross curricularly with some basic focus on biology and relationship through science and ethics, but that of their own accord teachers of subjects like English and Math should also be discussing sexuality when relevant. The goal is a holistic approach to sex education.

In this section, findings show not all the participants are aware of their responsibilities with regards to sex education. It is therefore, important to examine what the teachers are witnessing in their schools.

### **Occurrences or Lack Thereof Sex Education in Quebec's English Language High Schools**

Participants were asked about what is going on with regards to sex education in the province, in their schools and other schools. Participants noted that there was a deficiency in available resources and that students were suffering because of it. For instance, Jane stated that

...sex Ed has fallen through the cracks. It is now up to all teachers to answer questions related to sex as they come up in class. However, some teachers are uncomfortable discussing these topics with their students and vice versa.... no one is covering the material in any systematic way and this is creating serious knowledge gaps among the teenage population. The students will rely on Internet searches and information gleaned from their peers more often than asking their parents or teachers. This may or may not be causing an increase in STIs among the teenage population. There is also the issue of consent and developing healthy and respectful relationships that has been very prevalent in the media as of late, which should be explicitly explained to teenagers and young adults.

Mary's response was very similar as she also stated that sex education, in its current form, takes place, leaves a lot to be desired for the teachers.

The idea of every educator covering sex ed in his or her course is a wonderful concept, but unfortunately very few [teachers] are following through. As a result, our students are not receiving enough information about sex and sexuality that is leaving them in a very naïve and vulnerable state. Over the last couple of years, we have seen a rise in the dangers that technology can also play in relation to sex. Many students send revealing photos of themselves on SnapChat to their peers foolishly believing that these images will not be shared. In 2014, we need to not only be teaching sex education, but we need to also teach our students how to be responsible digital citizens.

Likewise, Emma was outraged by the lack of sex education regulation:

Nothing is happening. Individual teachers may be making an effort to provide their students with some information or guidance, but the lack of regulation and ownership over sex education has caused most teachers to simply forget about addressing it in their classrooms. Students still get the basics through Science and Biology courses, as well as some of the moral issues in their Ethics classes but this isn't enough to address the needs of the growingly self-aware, experimental and sexually diverse youth we encounter today.

Conversely, Lydia and Charlotte were completely unaware about the state of sex education in Quebec. Lydia said, "I don't really know the instruction that is taking place." While Charlotte stated, "I don't know because I don't teach it."

To summarize, some teachers are completely unaware what type of sex education is taking place in their schools. While other teachers are worried and frustrated with the lack of a coherent curriculum. In turn, the teachers are very concerned with the future physical and emotional states of their students.

### **Teachers, Schools and School Boards and the Promotion of Safe Sexual Behaviour**

The participants saw a need for sex education; however, they were unsure of how to implement MELS' expectations. When asked, "Are you taking any measures to promote safe sexual activity amongst your students," Mary stated that she was starting a sex education unit with special needs students, as it was an explicit part of their program. With regards to her other classes she stated,

I do not go out of my way to discuss the topic, but if the conversation arises in class, I do not shy away from the topic.

All of the participants had similar responses to this one. They did not plan it explicitly in their lessons but did not avoid questions or comments from students. Only Emma had tried to implement an explicit safe sex campaign in her subject at her previous school.

However, she encountered many obstacles:

I asked administration at my last school to allow Head and Hands Sense Project educators to come in and do workshops with my ethics students, but the proposal was rejected. The administrator did not believe that the content covered by Head and Hands was appropriate for our school community. The workshop educators are very open to discussing pleasure when covering sexuality as well as the fluidity of sexuality so the administrator felt that this approach was not in line with the school's values.

Emma stated that school administrators and school boards are able to promote safe sex practices in their schools. Moreover, she stated that they set the tone for sex education and should be encouraging teachers to follow the curriculum. When the participants were asked if their schools and/or school boards were promoting safe sexual behaviour their answers did not seem to vary. None of the participants knew of any school boards taking any actions to promote safe sexual behaviour. With regards to schools, the participants' answers demonstrated a minimal effort on the school's end. Mary said,

Asides from the ethics classes, I am unaware of other measures my school is currently taking.

Similarly, Charlotte did not know about any measure being taken by her school to promote safe sexual activity amongst students. Jane stated that the actions her school provided limited opportunities for discussing safe sexual practices,

...it is touched upon when we address issues of bullying and digital citizenship.

Only Elizabeth was able to identify an initiative in place at her school:

Recently, the nurse has started coming into English classes and gives talks about sex over three 50-minute periods. Some teachers are judgmental because she does give out condoms and think she is promoting sex. Some teachers feel that she shouldn't be giving out condoms. They believe that giving out condoms is like saying, "go have sex."

As Elizabeth noted, not everyone was receptive to the initiative. In Elizabeth's case it was the staff but in Lydia's case it was the students,

We have taken our students to presentations with the nurse who has talked to them about being safe. She handed out condoms. Unfortunately our students decided to use them as balloons.

To summarize, the approaches being taken by teachers and schools is clearly inconsistent. The participants noted that they had not witnessed any effort with regards to safe sex promotion from a school board level. The participants and schools are making

some efforts to promote safe sex but why are greater efforts not being made? Considering the controversial nature of sex education, perhaps it is a question of comfort.

### **Teacher Comfort and Sex Education**

As previously discussed in the literature review, sex is a controversial topic. It was established that parents are not always comfortable talking about sex with their children (Walker, 2007). This begs the question: are teachers comfortable talking about sex? The participants were divided on the topic of comfort. Emma declared,

I'm fairly comfortable talking about sexuality in my classes. I see the need for it. Whereas, Lydia and Charlotte admitted that they were not very comfortable with the topic.

When participants were asked if their backgrounds affected the way in which they viewed sex education or the way in which they would or have taught it, five out of six participants said yes. Elizabeth stated that her upbringing contributed to her lack of comfort.

I would be embarrassed. I would do it if I had to and I would do it well but I would not be comfortable. I was raised Catholic. Mary was adamant that background most definitely affected her views and the way in that she would teach or broach the topic.

Of course it does. I was lucky enough to have parents who were very open about sexuality. My mom never shied away from the details of sex and what makes a healthy sexual relationship. Because of this, I am more open to talking to young people about sex. Also, the fact that I was very young at the time of my first

sexual encounter and that I felt I was lacking information from my teachers as a student, pushes me to want to cover this topic in my classes.

To sum up, comfort plays an integral role in how likely a teacher is to teach sex education. Further to this point, not all the participants were comfortable with teaching sex education. There are several reasons for participants' comfort or lack thereof. Five out of six participants agree that a person's upbringing affects the way in which they would teach sex education.

### **Teaching Sex Education**

All participants were asked, 'what do you think are the best/ most effective ways to teach sex education?' All the participants had different answers. Jane noted that sex education should be taught using an:

...honest approach and a factual one. They should avoid moralizing students. Specifically, Jane was referring to how some teachers have taught abstinence instead of sex education. As previously discussed in the literature review, it was inevitable that values and morality issues would arise when teaching sex education but Emma addressed these issues and offered suggestions for fostering a open, non-threatening climate in sex education classes:

The students need to be comfortable, the teacher needs to be prepared and have systematic approach to covering the gamut from sexual health to healthy relationships. The parents need to be aware of what topics will be discussed in advance. If they are uncomfortable or do not want their children to be present due

to religious or cultural beliefs they can take the necessary measures to have their child removed from the class or absent for that discussion.

As for teaching mediums, Lydia identified that an effective way to interest students would be to offer,

Presentations from groups outside of the school worked well with our students.

Emma agreed that, ‘outsiders’ need to be involved but also stressed the importance of teacher-training to deliver effective content:

I think that, like any subject, a combination of methods would work best. We should utilize the organizations in our community, which provide resources and trained educators as much as possible. We also need to provide teacher training that includes practical approaches to teaching sex ed. Games, activities, discussion groups, guest speakers, info sessions, workshops, etcetera. Anything and everything that will get students talking about safer sex and making more informed choices.

This section discusses the participants’ views on how sex education should be taught. Each participant has a different view on how to teach sex education but have they received any training?

### **Sex education Training?**

When the teachers were asked whether or not they had had any sex education training the answer was a resounding no. There are many venues where sex education training can take place; for instance, pre-service university training or in-house through



the school or school board. The most novice participant, Mary, with only two full years experience referred to her relatively recent pre-service university training,

I have received very little training on the topic. During my time at McGill, I had to design a lesson plan on the topic, but this was the extent of my training.

Emma discussed the lack of training at the in-school level:

I was never given any training nor have I been offered any training through the school or school board.

Openness to training might be a factor that needs consideration. Not surprisingly, five out of six participants were open to receiving sex education training. The other participant felt that it was not within her teaching subject or her job description to teach sex education. Three out of the five participants knew where they could receive training.

In doing my own master's research, I was able to take courses and get connected with organizations like Head and Hands and Project 10 who offer workshops and resources for educators and students.

Elizabeth was the only one who said that she was able to receive training from her school board. However, she stated that there were many difficulties with the workshops that they offer.

There are workshops through the school board. Not MELS but through the school board. They are difficult to attend because of funding for release time or they are during Pedagogical (Ped) days when there are other workshops during the same time that are actually about your teachable subject. Sometimes we are forced to go to certain meetings during Ped Days because of the special programs that are taught at our school.

One participant stated that the lack of sex education training hindered how she responded to some students.

They want to talk about [sex] and to learn more. Once a discussion goes in that direction, it's often hard to bring it back. The only concern I have is when these teachable moments arise, I don't know what I am 'allowed' to say about sex to students in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade and what I'm not allowed to say. Because of this, sometimes I'm hesitant. Especially as a teacher without tenure, I've learned not to rock the boat in any way.

To summarize, only one participant had been offered sex education training from her school board. Unfortunately, she was unable to benefit from this opportunity because of time restraints and other pedagogical training that is more specific to her everyday teaching. The lack of sex education training is very unsettling. What's even more unsettling is the fact that one participant is completely unaware and disinterested in any type of sex education training. Receiving training is paramount as it gives teachers clear guidelines and can alleviate uncertainties as to what they are 'allowed' to teach. Furthermore, training can help when working with teens that are sexually vulnerable and or marginalized.

### **Safe Spaces for Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Youth**

The participants stated that they were all creating safe spaces in their classrooms for students who are LGBTQI. The term safe space was left to the interpretation of the participant. The reason for this was that, from the experience of the researcher, the term 'safe space' is very much part of the modern teacher's vernacular. When Emma was

asked, ‘Are you taking any measures to create a ‘safe space’ for students who are vulnerable (gay, bisexual, transgender)?’ she replied,

I have a poster in my classroom and a flag on my door that indicates to students that this is a safe space. I discuss gender and reasons why I don’t tolerate expressions like, “that’s so gay” in my classroom.

Lydia also stated that she does not let her students use that type of language.

Not allowing the use of words like ‘that’s so gay’ to be used in our environment to teach students that it’s important to not put anyone down or make them feel wrong for their feelings

One participant said that although she was not entirely comfortable with the topic of sex in general, she tried to use books such as ‘Go Ask Alice’ or ‘The Perks of Being a Wallflower’ because they explored a variety of interesting themes that the students can write about in responses or journals:

One of the boys at school was struggling with his sexuality. He started skipping school, losing weight and he looked tired and depressed. Teachers flagged it and brought it to the administration’s attention. They started investigating and he came out to the guidance counsellor. Guidance advised the teachers that he was having a difficult time. Eventually, he told his parents. His father beat him and he ended up in the hospital. When he finally came back to school he did not come out to his peers or teachers. When he returned to school on a regular basis, we started reading “The Perks of Being a Wallflower” where there are a variety of themes such as: homosexuality, abuse, molestation and relationships. One day, he

revealed through his writing that he was really enjoying the book because he could relate to one of the main characters because he was gay but that he didn't feel safe enough to come out to his classmates.

Another participant gave a similar response; both participants informally spoke about sex by choosing books that would elicit some type of subtle or visceral reaction from their students.

The participants were also asked if their schools or school boards were taking any measures to promote safe spaces for students who are vulnerable and the most common answer was that they allowed a Gay Straight Alliance club. One participant noted that the administration at her school was very reluctant to allow such a club because of the 'message it might send'.

The participants outlined issues they had faced while working with teenagers who are part of the LGBTQI community. Most of the participants said that they addressed and forbade homophobic language in their classrooms. Although they did not explicitly plan lessons about the LGBTQI community, some participants chose books that broach the topic in order to elicit reactions and discussions from their students. Additionally, the participants noted that it is important to address these issues in class but also outside of class in extra-curricular communities like GSAs.

### **Follow up questions on teenagers in a technological age:**

After transcribing and analyzing the data and editing the literature review, I realized that a pattern had emerged concerning technology. Social media sites such as

Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and Tumbler were mentioned throughout the interview process. In response, additional questions were sent to the participants to gather further information on digital dangers and sexting. One participant elaborated,

Sexting is definitely a problem. It's not face-to-face and that makes it easier for teens to do it. It's so common nowadays and so widely publicized that they think it is normal.

Another participant noted,

Every year we have to deal with some stupid girl, I say that with compassion but also irritation, sending a naked photo on social media even though we tell them not to do this type of thing. But they do, every single year.

This is definitely an area that needs further research.

To summarize, the participants' observations and experiences with today's youth reinforces a need and want for sex education in Quebec. Some are unaware of MELS' expectations and others feel that they need a coherent curriculum, training and resources in order to execute sex education properly. Safe sex promotion is not being done consistently on a school or school board level leaving adolescents vulnerable to emotional and physical harm.

## Chapter Five: Discussion, Limitations and Ways Forward

### Discussion

**Introduction.** This chapter will bring together all the issues that were previously discussed. First, it will discuss the topics that were elicited during the interview process. The study's limitations will then be discussed at length. This will be followed with a section devoted to potential ways forward in regards to sex education in Quebec. A brief summary that includes practical implications for the study will then be advanced with some concluding remarks.

**Risky behaviour amongst youth.** The observations and experiences of the teachers with regards to teenage sexual behavior is just a small sample of what is known. There is no reason to believe that the findings of this study are entirely idiosyncratic; nor can I generalize to a larger population. The fact is, there are teenagers, across Quebec and Canada, who are engaging in these types of activities and many of the adults in their lives (i.e., parents, teachers, nurses, doctors etcetera.) do not know what is occurring. To a certain extent, the adults only know what they are told. This is a very disconcerting when considering the participant's experience with students having sex parties or a girl getting raped after she blacked out from alcohol. These stories are only common knowledge because some students eventually came forward. It is more alarming to consider what is not being said. Finally, all of the participants in this study had been asked sex-related questions by some of their students thus deeming them a trusted adult figure, with the power to disseminate important information about sex.

**Uncertainty with regards to expectations.** Although only two participants were unaware of MELS expectations with regards to sex education it leads one to wonder, how and why did they not receive the information? Why is it that some teachers are unaware? In turn, how can some teachers teach without fully knowing what is expected? Finally, should teachers be blamed for not taking the initiative to learn the mandates and explicitly integrating them into their lessons? Dowd (2009) did a study on sex education in a boarding school and stated that teachers’ “busy schedules make change difficult” (p.51). Although specific to the school Dowd researched it seems realistic that the same logic could be applied the same logic to other teachers. If this is the case, who is to blame?

**School administration and power.** Emma noted that she had run into problems when trying to bring in Head and Hands to speak with her ethics class about sex. The administrator did not feel that the organization’s objectives fell in line with the school’s values. However, should not the public school’s values fall in line with the province’s? Below is the Heads and Hands mission statement,

Our approach is preventative, inclusive, non-judgmental, and holistic, with a fundamental commitment to providing an environment that welcomes youth without discrimination. We facilitate social change and the empowerment of youth based on their current needs within our community and society at large.

Head and Hand’s mission statement is parallel to with the schools’ mission “ (Duquet, 2003). More importantly, it corresponds to the fact that MELS has explicitly said that “The school must ensure students have access to the information they need to make

informed decisions on health, safety and sexuality.” (Duquet, 2008,p.8). Clearly, some school administrators are arbitrarily making decisions about what constitutes appropriate education initiatives and materials. However, this may be an indication that school administrations are making school-based decisions based on their own moral codes. Conversely, this may be an indication that administrators are trying to appease the multicultural communities in their schools. However, by trying to appease the parents who object to the Head and Hands’ Sense Project, the students are missing out on an opportunity to receive sex education from trained professionals.

In turn, it forces the question of how schools and school boards are fulfilling their responsibilities for sex education. “The *Education Act* stipulates that every school board is responsible for ensuring that the programs of study are implemented...The school board must distribute the resources related to complementary educational services based on the needs expressed by the schools” (Duquet, 2003, p. 18). Clearly, Emma, saw a need for a resource that the school board was not providing when she attempted to bring Head and Hands Sense project to her school.

**Comfort.** The expectation that teachers would just integrate sex education into their classes when a teachable moment arises seems a bit haphazard. Not all teachers are comfortable teaching this subject. An area that could do with future research is how MELS came to the decision to implement sex education into all courses? Did they ask teachers about comfort levels? Like any subject, if the teacher is not comfortable, transferring knowledge can be quite difficult. Eison (1990) states that confidence is one of the most important characteristics that effective teachers can possess. Confidence and



comfort go hand in hand. If a teacher is not comfortable with the material, they will not be confident. Moreover, it does not make for a pleasant experience for curious teenagers if their teacher has a difficult time talking about sex.

**Training.** One of the most obvious reasons teachers may not be comfortable is because they have not received any training on how to teach sex education. As stated in the literature review, sex education is precarious, especially in a diverse multi-cultural classroom. Therefore it is vital that teachers receive training in order to deliver the content effectively. Five out of six participants were receptive to sex education training. However, only one out of six participants was offered training through her school board. Again, teachers can try to get training but, as one participant noted, teachers usually opt for training in their teachable subject.

**GSAs and That's so Gay: Creating a safe space for LGBTQI and Language.** Five out of the six participants mentioned that they did not allow homophobic language in their classrooms. According to Thinkb4youspeak.com, this simple act of watching one's language is of utmost importance as it can help create a safe space for LGBTQI students. It was only in the transcribing of the interviews that I realized the majority of the participants mentioned this. These five participants mentioned that they forbade the phrase, "that's so gay" to be uttered from their students' mouths. Teachers may be more aware with regards to homophobic language is due to the rise of Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) in schools. For instance, all of the participants mentioned that their schools have GSAs. GSAs provide a safe space for all students while discussing important topics,

“safer space groups can create awareness campaigns around days of significance, host events, and invite guest speakers”(MyGSA.ca). And this may be the reason as to why teachers are making an effort to address homophobic language in their classrooms.

Thinkb4youspeak.com also asks that individuals sign a pledge stating that they will not use this type of language. The images and YouTube videos are poignant and impactful and demand that today’s youth be careful with their words. More research needs to be done in this area with regards to actual impact it has on teenagers and teachers.

**How should it be taught?** When all the participants were asked how sex education should be taught the answers varied. The reason for this might be that teaching is a very personal act. Throughout pre-service training, pre-service teachers are asked to develop their philosophies of education. A teacher’s philosophy of education embodies his or her values and experiences. It is a working document in that it is constantly evolving and changing. (Van Note Chism, 1998). This was demonstrated when five out of six participants stated that their backgrounds impact how they would teach sex education. Additionally, pedagogical practice has implications on delivering sex education content. Therefore, if teachers are not given specific teaching approaches, training, clear expectations and a comprehensive curriculum it is impossible for them to teach sex education in the most effective way. One would not teach math without a math degree or without some type of in-house training; is the government saying that if you can teach, you can teach any subject? Or is sex education not important that it only requires minimal attention in all subjects?

## **Limitations**

As previously stated, one of the limitations of this study lie in the fact that only female teachers were interviewed. Male teachers may have been able to give a different insight; however, having only female participants also represents the dominance of females in the teaching profession. Another limitation that was identified was the fact that only four schools and three school boards were represented; moreover, all schools and school boards were public institutions. Given that the researcher ascribes to a constructivist's paradigm, the researcher acknowledges that individuals construct their own realities but they were also able to limit what they want to share about said realities.

## **Ways Forward: Managing expectations with accountability**

One of the most disconcerting aspects of this study was the inconsistency with regards to sex education. Why is the approach so inconsistent from one school and one teacher to another? Not all teachers know what is expected from them with regards to sex education and those who do are not given the necessary resources or training, such as training, to implement sex education into their classrooms. Teachers can be seen as those at fault as they do not take a proactive approach to learning the mandated curriculum; however, school boards and school administrations are also to blame, as they do not provide teachers with adequate training and resources to implement the program effectively. Time and money are required to implement any resources and workshops: both of which seem to be missing from the scope of school board planning. As a results teachers, administrators, school boards and pre-service programs need to be held accountable for implementing sex education across the curriculum, but how?

Thurlow (2009) states that there are different types of educational accountability. The system that might work best in Quebec's education system, particularly sex education, involves many different stakeholders:

Educational accountability may also hold individuals responsible for their own performance. For example, students may be held responsible for their performance in school (such as through promotion tests or graduation exams). Teachers may be held responsible for their performance on content and pedagogy through entry examinations or periodic tests of knowledge and skills.

Implementing an accountability system, where all levels of the education system from student to teacher or school board to administrator are responsible and accountable to each other, would be beneficial because it would ensure that sex education is being taught properly in Quebec's schools. According to Anderson (2009), Moreover, it could potentially elevate sex education standards in this province,

Assuming responsibility for the learning of all students transforms the school and the classroom environment and, to some degree, the way that teachers view their profession and themselves. The popular literature is replete with heroic educators who, despite overwhelming odds, are able to change and improve a school through their zeal. A challenge of accountability systems is to make the heroic, customary (p. 5).

An example of an education accountability system is the Office of Standards in Education (OFSTED) in United Kingdom. OFSTED performs, hundreds of inspections and regulatory visits throughout England and publish[es]

the results online. [They] help providers that are not yet of good standard to improve, monitor their progress and share with them the best practice we find.[Ofsted's] goal is to achieve excellence in education and skills for learners of all ages, and in the care of children and young people (Ofsted).

OFSTED allows for all those involved in the education system to understand what is expected from them and keeps them accountable. If a similar accountability system was put in place for sex education it would ensure the following: school boards and administrators are offering training and resources to their teachers; teachers know the sex education curriculum and teachers deliver the sex education curriculum. Moreover, all stakeholders (school boards, administrators and teachers) are evaluated on a regular basis in order to ensure that students are learning about sex education.

One may argue that teachers and administrators do undergo evaluations; however, from my experience within the system, only contracted teachers are evaluated. Moreover, the evaluations that I have experienced have varied from 5 minutes to 60 minutes. The process is very subjective and is not rigorous.

The limitations that are involved in implementing an educational accountability system are the following: more research needs to be done in this area with regards to types of evaluations, union involvement and acquiring funds to implement this type of system.

Rosenthal (2004) states what is problematic about implementing an accountability system like OFSTED is that some feel that OFSTED inspections can cause severe stress on school personnel, hinder teacher creativity and do not necessarily have any direct impact on student success. Furthermore, implementing a system like this is a costly

endeavor.

Other limitations that are involved in implementing a sex education accountability system are the following: more research needs to be done in this area with regards to types of teacher evaluations, union involvement and the impact that an accountability system would have on schools that are publically and privately funded in Quebec.

### **Ways Forward: Examples of Places where Sex Education Works**

In 2003, the parameters of sex education changed in Quebec. Concrete sex education programs were taken out of the classroom and were replaced by a holistic approach. The training that the teachers received was minimal at best. Moreover, many school administrators and school boards failed to take a concrete stance with regards to sex education because it is a controversial topic. As a result, teachers were left untrained and do not know how to respond to precarious situations that they encounter on a regular basis. One way forward that would be beneficial for all involved stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, administrators and school boards) would be to create and implement a comprehensive sex education program that has clear and achievable goals. An example of an effective program with regards to teacher-training and resources is seen in Alberta.

**Go West, Go to Alberta.** In Alberta, there is a clear and comprehensive sex education program. From kindergarten to the end of high school, the objectives are clear and measurable for students, parents and teachers. For instance, “Alberta requires students in Kindergarten to identify external body parts and their function, and in grade 1 identify physical characteristics that make them similar to and different from others” and

“students in grade 7 to identify the effects of social influences on sexuality and gender roles” (Ophea, Healthy Schools Committee). Teachers in Alberta are told exactly what is expected of them.

Alberta’s Ministry of education also provides its teachers with a website (see Appendix D) and it has a link available for free to all teachers across Canada (see Appendix E). On the website, there are quality lesson plans that are divided by grade, topic and learning objective. In addition to this, the website also has online workshops for teachers. There are also demonstration videos that teachers can use. For instance, there is a video about male condom use. There are print resources and games. It must be noted that although the entire website is not translated into French, there are many resource that are in French.

There is also a section devoted to instructional methods. This section of the website looks at the most effective way to teach sex education. Some examples that they give are role play, a question box, digital media and class discussion. There is a section with exemplar student questions from different grade levels. The site also provides teachers with a toolkit on how to prepare themselves, their students, the parents and the community.

One of the most interesting aspects of the site is a list of agencies that one can access depending on where one lives. For instance, they give the contact information for centers that deal with: pregnancies; counseling; STI testing; parenting adolescents; sexual assault and LGBTQI. Unfortunately, the agencies are limited to different areas of Alberta.

In Alberta, there is legislation that states that parents and guardians must be kept abreast throughout their child's entire sex education and that they have the right to take their children out of lessons that they do not deem appropriate. One might argue that this defeats the purpose of having an effective sex education program; however, this type of legislation should not stop the operation of an effective sex education program.

Quebec could learn a lot from Alberta's sex education program in that it is comprehensive, provides teachers with resources, a variety of effective teaching methods and training. Above all, Alberta provides its teachers with clear and precise expectations.

### **Limitations to Both Ways Forward**

**Time and Money.** If Quebec decides to implement a system of accountability that is similar to OFSTED or a sex education program that is similar to Alberta's, it would require time and money. Substantial time would be needed to create the resources in French and in English for Quebec's youth. Moreover, the ever-present issue of money would rear its ugly head in order to employ specialists and create resources.

**Neoliberal Slippery Slope.** Implementing a unyielding accountability system in Quebec might bring about new problems. First of all, as previously stated, accountability systems do not guarantee academic or professional success. Second of all, if a strict sex education accountability system, like Ofsted, is put in place, teachers might lose certain pedagogical and professional freedoms. Lorenz (2012) makes a similar case for university professors and states that, "remarkably the case has never been properly made for why the professional autonomy of academics should be mistrusted and bureaucratic



formalism preferred”(607). Therefore, a happy medium must be found between blind trust and strict surveillance so that some teachers cannot become complacent and unaware of their job descriptions.

**Quebec is Quebec and Alberta is Alberta.** The culture of Quebec is very different than the culture of Alberta. Moreover, implementing a mandatory sex education program in Quebec would cause controversy in many schools and various communities. Therefore, MELS should look to Alberta more for inspiration on how to prepare its teachers to teach sex education. In theory, MELS could keep the same approach that it currently has with regards to sex education but provide teachers with training, resources, a variety of effective teaching methods and clear expectations and objectives. As a result, teachers would be more prepared and would know what is expected from them.

### **Practical Implications and Concluding Remarks**

This study was successful in shedding light on the realities teachers face in Quebec English language schools in regards to sex education. The study reinforces the want and need for sex education. Moreover, it establishes that some teachers are either unaware of MELS' expectations or uncertain on how to implement them. In addition to this, the findings of this study should be used to guide the curriculum developers and school administrators. For instance, the teachers' experiences and observations should be used to repair the parts of sex education program that are not working. Many of this study's findings can be used to enlighten both future research and practice

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**APPENDIX A**  
**RECRUITMENT LETTER**

To whom it may concern,

I am currently looking for participants for research that I am conducting for my thesis. I am looking at the gap in sex education in Quebec's English high schools. My research focuses on teacher perspective, i.e., what should be taught? Which subjects should teach it? How should it be taught? How is it currently taught? Etc.

I was hoping that you might know someone who fits the following participant profile and would be interested in participating in this study. Let me know, if you or someone you know is interested in participating.

Participant Profile:

- Quebec Certified Teacher (holds a Brevet/ Quebec Teaching Permit)
- Is currently teaching in an English high school in Quebec
- All subjects are welcome
- New and Seasoned teachers are welcome

Please note that all individuals who participate in this study will remain confidential and a pseudonym will be assigned to protect their identities.

If you are interested in participating in this research or have any questions, you can contact me at [kylie.joyce1985@gmail.com](mailto:kylie.joyce1985@gmail.com) or 514-802-0285.

Thank you.

**APPENDIX B  
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE FORM**

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN  
SEX EDUCATION IN QUEBEC'S ENGLISH HIGH SCHOOLS:  
HIGHLIGHTING THE GAP**

I understand that I have been asked to participate in a research project being conducted by Kylie Joyce (Telephone: (514)802-0285/ Email: kylie.joyce@mail.mcgill.ca) a masters students in the Educational Studies program at Concordia University . Kylie is under the supervision of Ailie Cleghorn PhD of the Educational Studies program of Concordia University (Telephone: 514-848-2424, Ext. 2041/ Email: ailie@education.concordia.ca

**A. PURPOSE**

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is as follows: to explore the stated purposes and the reality of sex education in English language secondary schools in Quebec.

**B. PROCEDURES**

I understand that the research will be conducted in a private space where I can speak openly. I understand that I will be interviewed with two other individuals for approximately 2 hours. I understand that I will be asked questions and that I am to answer these questions honestly. I also understand that I am not obliged to answer every question. I understand that I may also be interviewed individually after the group interview takes place. I understand that my confidentiality and well being will be considered and respected throughout the entire process.

**C. RISKS AND BENEFITS**

The only risk associated with this study is that I may feel somewhat uncomfortable during group or individual interviews. However, my participation is entirely voluntary and I may withdraw at any time with no repercussions whatsoever

**D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION**

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences.
- I understand that my participation in this study is (*pick appropriate word*):  
  
CONFIDENTIAL (i.e., the researcher will know, but will not disclose my identity)
- I understand that the data from this study may be published.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

If at any time you have questions about the proposed research, please contact the study's Principal Investigator Kylie Joyce in the Educational Studies masters program at Concordia University (Telephone: (514)802-0285/ Email: [kylie.joyce@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:kylie.joyce@mail.mcgill.ca)) or Ailie Cleghorn PhD of the Educational Studies program of Concordia University (Telephone: 514-848-2424, Ext. 2041/ Email: [ailie@education.concordia.ca](mailto:ailie@education.concordia.ca))

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics and Compliance Advisor, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 [ethics@alcor.concordia.ca](mailto:ethics@alcor.concordia.ca)

**APPENDIX C  
INTERVIEW GUIDE**

***Questionnaire***

***Interview Guide***

1. What do you teach?
2. How long have you been teaching?
3. Were you trained to teach in Quebec?
4. What was your experience with sex education as a child and teenager?
5. What teaching methods were employed?
6. As a teacher in an English language Quebec school, what do you see happening with regards to sex education?
7. What are the positive/negative occurrences?
8. Are you comfortable teaching sex education?
9. What have your experiences been like?
10. Do you think your colleagues are comfortable?
11. Does your background affect the way in which you view sex education or the way in which you teach sex education?
12. Have students come to you with questions about sex/sexuality?
13. What type of questions do they ask?
14. Do you think that students are more likely to ask a parent or a staff member questions about sex?
15. How do you think most parents react with regards to sex?
16. What are MELS' expectations with regards to sex education?
17. How much training have you been given on sex education?

18. Do you know where to receive training?
19. Would you like to receive training?
20. Have you asked your administration/school board to give your training?
21. From your experience, how sexual active do you think the students are?
22. Do the students need/ want sex education?
23. How is sex education being taught at your school or other schools?
24. Are you taking any measures to promote safe sexual activity amongst your students?
25. Is your school taking any measures to promote safe sexual activity?
26. Is your school board taking any measures to promote safe sexual activity?
27. Is the government taking any measures to promote safe sexual activity?
28. Are you taking any measures to promote healthy relationships (romantic/friendship) amongst your students?
29. Is your school taking any measures to promote healthy relationships?
30. Is your school board taking any measures to promote healthy relationships?
31. Is the government taking any measures to promote healthy relationships?
32. Are you taking any measures to create a 'safe space' for students who are vulnerable (gay, bisexual, transgender)?
33. Is your school taking any measures to create a 'safe space' for students who are vulnerable (gay, bisexual, transgender)?
34. Is your school board taking any measures to create a 'safe space' for students who are vulnerable (gay, bisexual, transgender)?

35. Is the government taking any measures to create a 'safe space' for students who are vulnerable (gay, bisexual, transgender)?
36. What do you think are the best/ most effective ways to teach sex education?

## Appendix D

### Albert Education Website (<http://www.education.alberta.ca>)


www.education.alberta.ca — Alberta Education

Government of Alberta | Ministries | Services | Contact Government

Alberta Education

Alberta.ca > Education

Home Department Information and Newsroom Students Parents Teachers Administrators Français Online Tools and Resources



Honourable Gordon Dirks

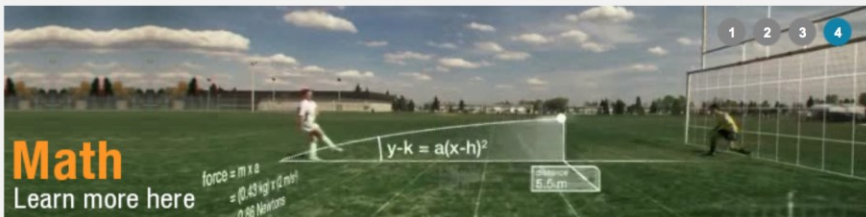
- Mandate Letter

About Us

- Our Ministry
- Newsroom
- Publications
- Current Initiatives

Quick Links to Related Education Sites

- Inspiring Education
- High School Completion
- LearnAlberta.ca
- Speak Out
- Vision Education Alberta
- Alberta Learning Information Service
- Study in Alberta
- Innovation and Advanced Education



**Math**  
Learn more here

Affected by English Language Arts diploma outage? [Click here](#) for information on applying for an exemption.

#### What are you looking for?

High School Transcripts

» Order your high school transcripts

Alberta Student Number

» How to get your Alberta Student Number

High School Diploma

» Find out the requirements for an Alberta High School Diploma

General Educational Development (GED) tests

» Learn about GED tests

Kindergarten to Grade 12

» Discover the Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum and related information

Teach in Alberta

» Learn how to become certificated to teach in Alberta

## Appendix E

### Sexual Health Website for Teachers (<http://teachers.teachingsexualhealth.ca>)

The screenshot shows the homepage of the teachingsexualhealth.ca Teacher Portal. The browser address bar displays the URL [teachers.teachingsexualhealth.ca](http://teachers.teachingsexualhealth.ca). The website header includes the logo for teachingsexualhealth.ca with the tagline "comprehensive, accessible, innovative" and "TEACHER PORTAL". Social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are visible, along with links for "Terms of Use" and "About Us".

The main navigation menu includes: Home, Lesson Plans, Teaching Tools, Agencies, Resources, and Ask a Question. A search bar is located to the right of the navigation menu.

The central content area features a "Welcome!" message on a dark background, stating: "Welcome to the teachingsexualhealth.ca Teacher Portal. Providing comprehensive, accessible, and innovative resources for today's teachers and educators." This text is overlaid on a photograph of a smiling man in a classroom setting.

Below the welcome message, there are four featured sections, each with an icon, a brief description, and a "+ Read more.." button:

- Lesson Plans:** Search by grade or by topic and find Alberta sexual health curriculum outcomes.
- Online Workshops:** Online workshop opportunities for teachers and health professionals.
- Instructional Methods:** The most effective ways to teach sexual health to your students.
- Student Questions:** Find answers to common sexual health questions asked in the classroom.