

## “Sandpaper. Yeah.”: Educators’ embodied insights into comprehensive sexual health education pedagogy

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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

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# “Sandpaper. Yeah.”: Educators’ Embodied Insights into Comprehensive Sexual Health Education Pedagogy

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## Abstract

In this arts-informed inquiry, I examine Canadian sex educators’ embodied sense-making of comprehensive sexual health education (CSHE). I seek to understand how educators use their bodies to negotiate contested pedagogical terrain in order to gain insights into conflicting patterns observed in the literature, as well as to challenge how educators’ personal pedagogies may be implicated in uneven enactments of CSHE. Using sensory ethnographic principles, I focus inquiry on educators’ embodied experiences of contentious pedagogical practices, including the over-reliance on institutionalized forms of knowledge. I conceptualize their experiences as “interchange”—the sense of simultaneous bodily gaining and giving in response to the social-political demands of teaching CSHE. I analyze two focal experiences of interchange—namely, Feeling Right(s) and Being Schooled—to highlight paradoxical frictions of educators’ personal and pedagogical anti-oppressive aims. Last, I utilize Maclaren’s concept of “unfreedom” to discuss addressing problematic CSHE practices as an intersubjective project.

*Keywords:* embodiment, sexual health education, sex educators, arts-informed

## Résumé

Dans cette recherche utilisant une approche renseignée par l'art, j'examine la façon dont les éducateurs canadiens en éducation sexuelle donnent un sens concret à l'éducation complète à la sexualité (ECS). Je cherche à comprendre comment les éducateurs mobilisent leur personne pour négocier un terrain pédagogique controversé, afin de mieux comprendre les modèles contradictoires observés dans la littérature et de vérifier la façon dont les pédagogies personnelles des éducateurs peuvent être impliquées dans la mise en œuvre inégale de l'ECS. Par l'utilisation des principes de l'ethnographie sensorielle, je concentre ma recherche sur les expériences de pratiques pédagogiques litigieuses vécues par les éducateurs, y compris sur la confiance excessive en des formes institutionnalisées de connaissances. Je conceptualise leurs expériences comme un « échange », c'est-à-dire les sentiments simultanés d'un gain et d'un don de soi en réponse aux exigences sociopolitiques de l'enseignement de l'ECS. J'analyse deux expériences focales d'échange – à savoir le sentiment de légitimité et celui d'être/de s'instruire – pour mettre en exergue les frictions paradoxales des objectifs anti-oppressifs personnels et pédagogiques des éducateurs. J'utilise enfin le concept de « non-liberté » de Maclaren pour discuter du traitement des pratiques problématiques de l'éducation à la santé sexuelle en tant que projet intersubjectif.

*Mots-clés:* incarnation, éducation à la santé sexuelle, éducateur en sexualité, approche renseignée par l'art

## Introduction

In this research, I explore educators' embodied sense-making of a sexual health education training program—that is, a program that teaches individuals how to be comprehensive sexual health educators in British Columbia, Canada. I undertake this inquiry within my broader aim of studying how educators use their bodies to way-find through contested terrain to ascertain what constitutes effective comprehensive sexual health education (CSHE). I view such inquiry as highlighting complex negotiations of care, ethics, pedagogy, politics, and priorities; and so, I ask: What pedagogical insights can be gained through more deeply understanding educators' experiences of CSHE training? I hope to bring attention to how we might understand conflicting pedagogical patterns noted in the literature anew

(Albert, 2022; Ng et al., 2017; Ninomyia, 2010; Walters & Lavery, 2022), as well as challenge broad assumptions about the ways in which educators' personal pedagogies are implicated in uneven enactments of CSHE in Canada (e.g., Action Canada, 2020).

I engage in this specific inquiry as literature shows that many factors can impact how CSHE pedagogy is delivered. Yet, relatively little attention has been paid to how factors shape the educators themselves who teach CSHE pedagogy (Basian, 2015; Ninomyia, 2010). To help address this gap, I undertake arts-informed, sensory ethnographic inquiry (Pink, 2015) to explore novice sex educators' embodied experiences of adopting disputed CSHE pedagogical practices, which have been argued as over-emphasizing neutrality and rights-based discourses at the expense of complex sexual ethics, expressions, and relationality (Gilbert, 2014; Gilbert et al. 2018; Lamb, 2013). Conducting data interpretation via a two-part compositional piece (White & Lemieux, 2015), I conceptualize the sex educators' embodied experiences as "interchange": the sense of simultaneous bodily gaining and giving in response to social-political demands of delivering CSHE. Specifically, I use fragmentation (Belcourt, 2021) to share and particularize two focal gaining/giving experiences of interchange—Feeling Right(s) and Be/ing Schooled—that illuminate how educators' sense-making of being a "comprehensive sexual health educator" is characterized by paradoxical frictions that can counter personal and pedagogical anti-oppressive aims. I discuss the implications of interchange via Maclaren's (2018) intersubjective concept of "unfreedom" to posit how shifting problematic pedagogical practices may involve centring specific tensions of CSHE's rights-based framing that scholars, allies, and educators might wish remain unacknowledged.

## **Sex Educators in Canada**

I concentrate my inquiry on the embodied experiences of sex educators—here, those who enact CSHE through teaching and learning practices as a primary profession. Like Trimble (2012), I view sex educators as having specific training about sexuality-related information, and participating in learning and teaching activities dedicated to sex education in various environments. CSHE is inseparable from sex educators; as Allen (2011) has demonstrated, sex educators are integral to supporting learners in experiencing sexuality in positive ways.

I note that sex educators handle varied and conflicting information, knowledge, and experiences about sexuality. Sex educators must address far more than practical questions of what to teach, when, and to whom in a given setting. As evidenced in the recent debates in Ontario (Saarreharju et al., 2020), British Columbia (MacLeod, 2019), and Alberta (Grace, 2018; Long, 2019), sex educators converge ethical, political, legal, moral, and cultural considerations to deliver specific education about sexuality. Each of these considerations can inform, resist, and run counter to expressed educational intentions.

A review of the literature highlights that educators' pedagogical negotiations reflect multiple, overlapping flows of insight and direction, including: personal pedagogies (Hare, 2021a, 2021b); professional training and frameworks (Alldred, 2018); personal knowledge, experience, and comfort with different topics (Brouskeli & Sapountzis, 2017); and ideological perspectives (Albert, 2022; Britton & Dunlap, 2017). Sex educators also account for school and community factors, such as resourcing, time, and perceived reactions from parents, to determine content framing and emphases (Buston & Wight, 2004; Cohen et al. 2011; Eisenberg et al., 2010). Francis (2014) and Grace (2006) both highlight that educators' intersections of identity can further shape and shift pedagogy in complex ways. To conceptualize educators' sense-making of CSHE pedagogy, I take into account how these factors can come together; the ways that ideological inscriptions and senses of what sexuality "is," professional training, and personal trajectories may colour particularizations of CSHE.

## **Patterns in CSHE Pedagogy**

In light of the evidence detailing the complex, personalized nature of educators' engagements with sex education, I find it noteworthy that CSHE is delivered in consistent, patterned ways in Canada. Encouraging evidence suggests that CSHE often promotes the recognition of sexuality/gender rights, increases sexual equity, and builds individuals' capacities for sexual communication (Sex Information and Education Council of Canada [SEICCAN], 2019). Simultaneously though, literature suggests that CSHE entails persistent challenges. Areas consistently identified for improvement include an over-reliance on institutional information sources that increasingly invoke legality (Lavery et al. 2021, Action Canada, 2020), the use of seemingly "neutral" discourses that are divisive and stigmatizing (Ng et al., 2017; Albert, 2022; Slovin, 2016), and the lack of critical engagement with corporeal

sexuality (Charest & Kleinplatz, 2021; Walters & Lavery, 2022)—all of which can reinforce forms of oppression, and beg deeper exploration into how these patterns come to be.

To date, relevant research has provided social-political analyses of conditions supporting and resisting sex education (e.g., Bashford & Strange, 2004; Ng et al., 2017), investigations into governance-based provisions of direction and resources (e.g., Grace, 2018; Robinson et al., 2019; Thorogood, 2000), and explorations of the provision of and learners' experiences of sex education (e.g., Action Canada, 2020; Alldred, 2018; Klein & Breck, 2010; MacDonald et al., 2011). In this research, I contribute a fine-grained, arts-informed exploration that can provide additional, contextualized insights into how pedagogical practices are known, (re)produced, empowered, questioned, and disputed via educators' experiences, as a means of helping educators and scholars consider corresponding implications for shifting the enduring challenges of CSHE in Canada.

### **Theoretical Orientation**

I utilize phenomenological theorizations of lived bodies to conceptualize embodiment as “felt-sense.” I define felt-sense as the emergent sensations and feelings of bodies as they come into experience via the world; expanding beyond the five-sense hierarchy, I view felt-sense in terms of Rodaway's (1994) concept of multisensoriality in that all sensory systems of the body are interconnected and enmeshed with feelings (see also Pink, 2015). The term felt-sense has been phenomenologically utilized by others, such as Gendlin (1981), who articulates embodied felt-sense as

internal aura that encompasses everything you feel and know about the given subject at a given time all at once rather than detail by detail...like, or a great musical chord that makes you feel a powerful impact, a big round unclear feeling. (p. 32)

I alternatively take up felt-sense in the vein of Salamon (2010) to focus on the particularity of feeling and sensing that can frustrate the categorical, social-political summary of persons. I see this focus as applicable to categories not only like sex and gender (Stachowiak, 2017), but also ones like “educator” and “anti-oppressive” that have implications for personal pedagogies and the aims of CSHE.

My attention to felt-sense matches sensory sexuality scholars like Waskul et al. (2009), who suggest that sensory attention can reach ways of knowing that words alone

cannot—theoretically, methodologically, and pedagogically. I understand there to be a constitutive relationship between felt-sense and other forms of knowing (sense-making), including language, metaphors, symbols, and other visual, arts-informed expressions. Indeed, “mind is embodied, meaning is embodied, and thought is embodied in this most profound sense” (Johnson & Lakoff, 2002, p. 249).

I see educators’ forms of felt-sense communication as conceptual “vehicles for making sense of bodily sensations and actions” that “turn sensation into sense or meaning” (Hughes & Paterson, 1997, p. 332), empirically placing embodied selves and social systems into productive analytical relationships that reflect relations of power. In particular, Maclaren (2018) explains how embodied understandings are intersubjective and provide a way to see how:

institutions, practices, and other workings of power do not merely constrain us from the outside, but more profoundly, transgress into our experience and constitute the very manner in which we perceive the world and ourselves, the possibilities that we find available or not within our situation, and the positions that we feel ourselves legitimately able to assume. (p. 18)

I do not view intersubjective embodiments of power as fixed. Like Allen’s (2020) sensuous scholarship on breathing and sex education pedagogy, I understand educators’ felt-sense to be recursive in that each event (re)creates meaning, contributing to the continuation of those meanings, while also recasting meaning in somewhat new ways. I thereby view attention to felt-sense as opening up possibilities for institutional change, even for seemingly patterned or entrenched pedagogical practices.

### **Methodological Approach: Sensory Ethnographic Study**

My arts-informed methodological approach to inquiry aligns with contemporary scholarship that emphasizes the use of creative, collaborative methods (Allen, 2018; Gilbert et al., 2018); and affective (Renold & Ringrose, 2016) and experiential (Fahs, 2015) approaches to sexuality and sex education research. I read these approaches as advocating for inquiry that seeks to access deep, corporeal ways of knowing to extend existing discursive and constructivist scholarly knowledge by particularizing felt-sense knowledge in holistic ways. Here, I take up an arts-informed approach as a mode of qualitative research that is influenced by, but not based in, the arts broadly conceived (Cole & Knowles,

2007). My arts-informed methodology infuses scholarly inquiry with languages, processes, and forms of literary and visual arts for purposes of advancing knowledge about subjectivities, emotion, responsiveness, and the ethical dimensions of the educators' human condition (Cole & Knowles, 2007).

I utilize a first-person sensory ethnographic approach that considers sensory experiences, perceptions, and categories used in everyday life to get at felt-sense (Pink, 2015). I seek access to areas of embodied, situated knowing and to "use these as a basis from which to understand human environments, activities, perception, experience, action and meaning" (Pink, 2015, p. 54) through "direct and sustained contact with human agents, within the context of their daily lives" (O'Reilly, 2005, p. 3). I see sensory ethnography as providing an integrated approach to understanding the educators' felt-sense experiences of teaching and learning CSHE, and highlighting novel, embodied forms of pedagogy.

## Program Overview

I carried out this sensory ethnographic work with a community-based, sexual health educator training program (SHEC). SHEC is run by Options for Sexual Health, which is a research partner for this project. SHEC prepares novice sex educators with the knowledge and skills to work within public schools and community settings in the province of British Columbia, Canada and beyond. Having run for approximately 20 years, the program operates as a well-established training opportunity for teaching rights-based, comprehensive sex education. The program is considered to be a best-practice enactment of CSHE in Canada, with programmatic content helping inform the *Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education* (SEICCAN, 2019).

SHEC is approximately five months in duration, and requires 120 hours of in-class time, with approximately the same amount of time required completing at-home requirements for the course. Students can elect to complete a 50-hour practicum placement to reach certification. SHEC is highly interactive, with a variety of lessons and practical activities. The required readings are quite extensive, including the BC curriculum standards, various policy documents, general information, and teaching resources. The course is divided into five modules, which covers a range of topics, such as reproductive biology, contraception, body science, puberty, pregnancy, birth, pregnancy options, sex and the law, adult education, seniors, parent education, LGBTQ2Q+ students, and sexuality and disabilities. Other practical topics of becoming an educator are also included, such as



marketing and networking. Throughout, SHEC students are simultaneously teachers and learners—blurring a binary understanding of sex educator and aligning well with my own conceptualization of “educator.”

## **Data Generation and Interpretation**

I enrolled as a student in SHEC, as part of a cohort of 12. Following ethical procedures around free and informed consent (University of British Columbia H18-02776), I recruited five focal participants: three were in my cohort completing the course, and two were completing their practicums. I included myself as a sixth focal participant. I did so heeding Pink’s (2015) description that sensory ethnography involves engaging with “knowledge or ways of knowing that are based on ethnographers’ own experiences and the ways these intersect with the persons, places and things encountered during that process” (p. 5). As SHEC graduates constitute a small, identifiable pool of people, I describe participants in Table 1 to provide insights into their positionalities, while not revealing key identifying characteristics. All identity terms were self-defined by participants.

To document my own and the five focal participants’ experiences of SHEC, I used a range of methods in a two-stage process: data generation and data interpretation. I view methods as what Stevenson (2017) terms sensuous enactments—embodied practices that provide insights into, rather than representations of, the participants’ whole-body ways of knowing. Over the duration of the study, I strove to create an account loyal to the context—embodied, felt-sense experiences of learning to teach CSHE—and highlight the intersubjective negotiations through which experiential knowledge is produced.

My first stage of inquiry, data generation, comprised of two major research components, (1) Fieldwork and (2) Solicited Multisensory Accounts, each of which had entailed qualitative and arts-based methods adapted for my study. These methods included blackout poetry (a form of erasure poetry), body-map storytelling (drawing and narrating stories about bodies), and creative expressions through writing, interviews, and body enactments (expressing emotions through bodily movements). These methods are detailed in Table 2. I used these methods to generate experimental and exploratory data that combined text, talk, expressions, and visualizations as research products. The methods for data generation include procedures from both “data collection” and “data analysis” (as sometimes termed in other forms of research), which cumulated in my penultimate analytic or, as I call it, interpretive stage.

**Table 1**  
*Participant Descriptions*

Pseudonym	Gender Identity	Sexual Identity	Ethnic/Cultural Identity	Additional Characteristics
Aurora	Cis-woman	Straight	White Canadian	50s Social worker; mother of adult children; dating
Llyr	Gender Non-conforming	Open	Multicultural; Multilingual	Late 20s Community worker; raised in an insular community in Middle East
Vanessa	Cis-woman	Straight	White Canadian; Métis ancestry	Late 30s K–12 educator; mother raising pre-pubescent children
Malka	Cis-woman	Does Not Use an Identifier	Prefer not to disclose	Early 30s Adult immigrant to Canada; raised in a country described as highly patriarchal; experienced sexual health educator
Jasper	Gender Questioning	Attracted to Men	White, Settler	Late 20s Runs own youth sexual health education business with feminist and queer focus
Kaye	Cis-woman	Complex/ Fluid	White Canadian, Settler	Mid 30s Early career scholar; university instructor; feminist

**Table 2**

*Summary of Research Methodological Process*

Research Components	Data Generation Methods		Research Products	Data Interpretation
	Data Collection	Data Processing		
1. Fieldwork	Ethnographic Participation and Field Notes (Pink, 2015)	Research Chronicling with Reflexive Prompts (Hare 2020)	Reflexive Research Chronicle	Compositional piece that incorporates text, visual depictions, photographs, and creative expressions via fragmentation
	Qualitative Document Review (Altheide et al., 2008)	Focused Content Review	Excerpts	
2. Solicited Multisensory Accounts	Body-Map Storytelling (x2 Rounds) (Gastaldo et al., 2012; Sweet & Ortiz Escalante, 2015)	Participant Description & Visual Analysis	Body Maps #1 & #2 Narration	
	Booklet of Expressive Undertakings (James et al., 2013)	Sensory Written Text Analysis	Expressive Writings/ Drawing	
	Body Enactions (Winters, 2008)	Participant Description & Thin Description	Video Clips + Narrations	
	Erasure Poetry (Kleon, 2010; Nyman, 2018)	Participant Analysis	Erasure Poems + Readings	
	Sensorial Interview (McAvoy, 2015)	Affective-Discourse Analysis	Transcribed Interviews	

In the interpretative stage, I was/am inspired by Blaikie's (2009) and White and Lemieux's (2015) arts-based education scholarship to create a two-part compositional piece. As this inquiry is a subset of a larger ethnographic study (Hare, 2021b), the compositional piece centres on data conveying the felt-sense of "interchange," as relevant to accounting for pedagogical patterns related to institutionalization, rights-based framing and neutrality in CSHE in Canada. In the compositional piece, I draw on Belcourt's (2021) work on decolonization to use fragments as a productive interpretive mode that can challenge common-sense logic and assumptions, as well as integrate surprise into interpretation. When I use these fragments (marked through different images and fonts), I am exploring the feeling of putting together ideas and focusing on granular experiences. I layer carefully chosen data from the solicited multi-sensory accounts (e.g., components of body-maps, erasure poems and poetic units, expressive writing, thin descriptions, and quotes), my reflective narratives/insights, and relevant connections to SHEC content. I also discuss relevant scholarship throughout to contextualize the findings and the educators' experiences.

## **Study Limitations**

In engaging with the compositional piece below, readers should be mindful that SHEC is the intellectual property of Options for Sexual Health, and I have shared only components of the content. The study should not be considered an overview of SHEC. As well, SHEC is specifically tailored to and emerges from its particular British Columbian context. My corresponding analysis is grounded in an understanding of CSHE that has been shaped by a politically liberal province and an economically stratified landscape, including major cities wherein many learners have many privileges and come from families holding strong cultural traditions about sexuality. Another context could result in different CSHE pedagogical choices. Lastly, while I was able to achieve relative diversity for the number of participants in terms of social class, language, and age, with some gender and ethnic diversity, the experiences shared are neither comprehensive nor representative; in this inquiry, I am prioritizing in-depth, artful understandings of specific educators' embodied selves.

## Findings: Two-Part Compositional Piece “Interchange”

*Interview Question: If SHEC was as a texture, it would be...*

*Aurora: Sandpaper. Yeah.*

Exploring how the educators’ embodied experiences may provide insights into patterned enactments of CSHE, my two-part compositional piece centres on the felt-sense of “interchange.” I conceptualize interchange as an oppositional, friction-generating, yet co-constitutive feeling of learning to teach CSHE—the feeling of sandpaper that participant Aurora captures above. In using the sense of being sandpapered as the conceptual frame for my interpretation of interchange, I think about how sandpaper has a flat surface on one side and is gritty and abrasive on the other. I also understand that sandpaper’s primary purpose is to remove a surface layer of material through friction to make a surface smooth. Occasionally, sandpaper can make the texture of something rougher, as its use is simultaneously flattening and catching. To this end, the compositional piece is focused on two parts of interchange experiences and how they are akin to the respective smoothing and roughing parts of sandpaper: Feeling Right(s) and Be/ing Schooled. These conjoined areas of interchange highlight educators’ sense-making about rights-based framing, specific institutional forms of knowledge, and discursive practices in CSHE in ways that capture the particulate matters that sand/shape educators’ experience. I explore how the educators experienced the felt-sense of simultaneous, granulated, levelling off and catching to provide insights into the tensions, subjectivities, and emotions that troubled educators’ categorical summaries of being a “comprehensive sexual health educator.”

### Interchange 1: Feeling Right(s)

*Vanessa - Five Word Personal Memoir*

*I want to help people*

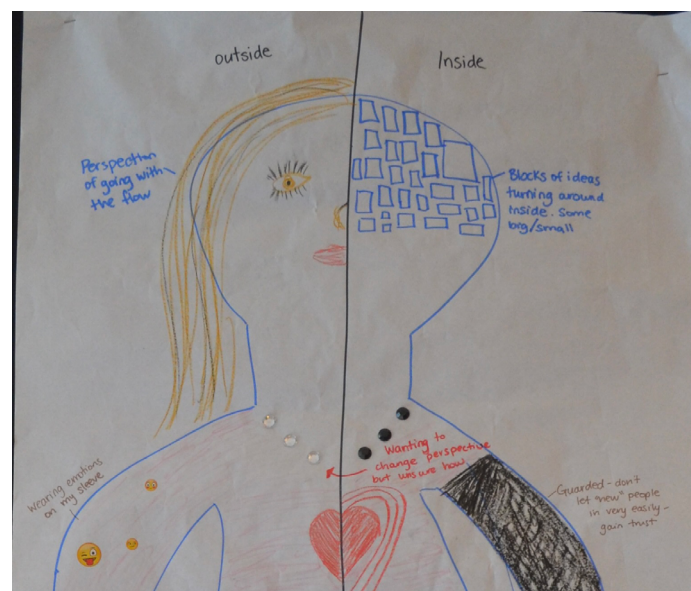
Upon starting SHEC, like Vanessa in her memoir, the novice educators described enrolling in the training program because they felt a strong desire to provide excellent, personally meaningful sex education, but were unsure how to do so. While educators wanted to develop varied forms of knowledge and skills through SHEC (e.g., curricula develop-

ment, networking and marketing, educator identity), the wider socio-political context of stigmatization, sex-negativity, and risk about sexuality (Action Canada, 2020; Albert, 2022)—the context that drew the educators to the subject matter—made this challenging.

As the educators realized that they (too) would soon be delivering sex education, they began to express a deep unease and/or unsureness about how CSHE pedagogy can be “an especially dense transfer point for relations of power,” wherein socio-political processes that shape ways of knowing are particularly intersubjectively expressed on/via sexual bodies (Foucault, 1990, p. 103). An unease about how to be anti-oppressive was especially apparent in the educators’ starting body maps. Notably, although this unease manifested multiple ways, the felt-sense was often visually depicted as encircling or bounding the body, and especially around key educator body parts like the throat/mouth (Figure 2) and hands (Figure 3).

### Figure 1

*Vanessa – Body Map #1*



Detailed in Figure 1, Vanessa conveyed a sense of (in)ability to speak that centred on her lack of confidence as a sex educator. Vanessa felt that while her previous K–12 teacher training provided her with a strong foundation in terms of classroom fundamentals, and she personally held requisite values to be an excellent educator, SHEC could help her adopt “something” she was missing pedagogically.

**Figure 2***Aurora – Body Map #1*

In Figure 2, Aurora’s sense of feeling chained (as wrapped around her hand) connected to an unease about how much her personal sexual ideologies may fit with CSHE instruction. Aurora’s unease stemmed from seeking to reconcile her to-be enacted CSHE pedagogical approach with the multiple, contradictory sources of sex information/education she had experienced. Aurora questioned ideologies that she had embodied, wondering “Are they made up ones? Are they really mine? Are they ones I just grew up with along the lines, or, or have they changed? Am I willing to let them change?”

It was through taking on the role of sex educator that the implications of abstract, ideological divisions of different pedagogies became concrete in personally resonant ways. As highlighted in my verbal description below, educators became aware of the deep, corporeal complexity of providing sex education.

#### *Kaye - Body Enaction #2*

It was...fear, actually...when they are talking about the [Kindergarten to Grade 2 students] and...talk about showing the kids condoms, so they know what they are, so they don’t pick them up...I haven’t really been uncomfortable or afraid to do anything. But I had this very strong, kind of “oh my goodness, how would parents react??” And I know it is fine...but I had this very unsettled feeling of “uuuunnnhhhhhh.”

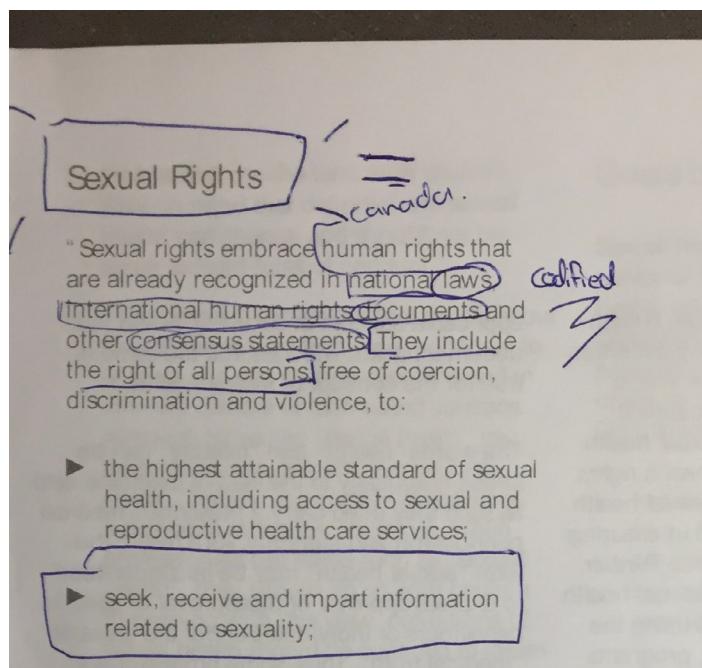


Despite educators' initial unease, it was startling (for me at least) how quickly a collective sense of clarity emerged that it is possible to "push through" the socio-political complexities of teaching sex education. Indeed, by the end of the first weekend of SHEC, the novice educators had acquired a consistent understanding of how they might effectively position themselves in the field by using the cornerstones of CSHE pedagogy. In particular, the educators learned that if they deliberately coupled right-based discourses with sex education (the protected "right to education" including sex) to invoke the power of the Canadian legal system, they would be able to smooth over any potential or experienced challenges.

In detail, SHEC students were introduced to *The Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education* (SEICCAN, 2019). The guidelines explicitly connect sexual rights to pedagogical practice, stating that sexual rights embrace human rights that are already recognised in national laws, international human rights documents and other consensus statements. They are the right of all persons (SEICCAN, 2019). I emphasized this in my marginalia in Figure 3.

### Figure 3

Kaye – Marginalia from Coursework





This idea was then furthered by a second primary document of instruction, which was the Province of British Columbia's Ministry of Education's Curriculum (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016). Located in Physical and Health Education, the curriculum outlines the legal learning standards and curricular competencies for K–12 students. Here it was emphasized in SHEC that learning about topics related to sexuality is a legally protected right. These ideas then formed interlocking components of SHEC/CSHE's systemic pedagogical approach in which legal standards establish sexual rights as a protected human right, and which, in turn, bind/enable the provision and access of sexuality-related knowledge through public education (Thorogood, 2000).

Threaded through this institutionalization of sex education was emphasis on being neutral, unbiased, and inclusive. Sex educators were urged to choose deliberate language as part of their CSHE pedagogy, language that conveyed a sense of non-judgement to learners. For example, typical phrasing that the educators learned to adopt in SHEC included: "We likely have someone in this room who..."; "It is your right to know that..."; and "This might be important information for someone who is interested in..." Such phrasing is intended to provide assurances of anonymity for learners to engage with information that is often stigmatized, and perhaps unsettle the assumption that learners have a rigid, singular, and determined sense of identity.

In navigating CSHE pedagogy by coupling sexuality to human rights discourse via precise teaching practices, the educators experienced a validating felt-sense of legitimization in their quest to become sex educators. The educators felt confident knowing that, although they were likely to encounter ideology-based disputes, providing rights-based, legally backed education would smooth their paths. Such an instance was storied by Jasper in their expressive undertakings booklet (The Nudes Dispute):

*I'm teaching about online safety & the 'man' who hired me  
to come into this youth centre is fighting me on  
whether or not it's the VICTIMS fault for sharing  
an intimate image of themselves that later gets distributed.  
...He fights me for 30 minutes + even pulls up a random  
website that supports his victim-blaming stance. I  
told him that the Canadian Criminal code is also available  
online...Instead of shutting the fuck up + listening to the 90%*

*of the room that is doing a lot of emotional labour to try to  
get him to understand the harm he is causing,  
He sticks stubbornly to his opinion.  
I learned 3 things:  
- Shut that shit down fast next time  
-Bring the informational resources with as you proof as much  
as much as you can  
-Sometimes you can't change a person's mind.*

The educators further expressed this felt-sense of support/protection from working within parameters of the governance-based institutions that rendered them with the feeling that they would be able to effect desired changes on a wider level. The educators experienced a sense of swift, easy momentum of being institutionally, politically supported (intersubjectively), or as we see in Llyr's erasure poem in Figure 4, empowered, to carry out CSHE.

**Figure 4**

*Llyr – Erasure Poem #1: Feelings about SHEC*

how various bodies and sexualities are disempowered through their very existence  
Contemporarily, we can understand that there are several primary pedagogical  
approaches employed in Canada: abstinence-based, rights-based, and comprehensive. While  
originally grounded in institutionalized settings, the pedagogical approaches also proliferate  
many other sexual education exchanges – media, peers, parents (e.g., Collins et al., 2003;  
Herbenick & Reece, 2009; Kidger, 2005). These pedagogies are accompanied by orientations  
that highlight specific areas of focus or attitudes, such as sex-positivity, feminist, queer-friendly,  
traditionalist or pro-life.  
Perhaps the most contentious pedagogical approach is abstinence-based education,  
which has been famously debated in the United States and Canada over recent decades (Sex  
Information and Education Council of Canada [SEICCAN], 2010). Often coupled with religious  
perspectives, abstinence-based education discourages assumed heteronormative pre-marital  
sexual activity, and limits information accordingly. In contrast, comprehensive sexual education  
typically includes age-based, medically accurate information on a broad set of topics related to  
sexuality including human development, relationships, decision-making, abstinence

It is this feeling of institutional support that the educators (e.g., Vanessa, above) were seeking when they enrolled in SHEC, and reported feeling the need for more training, despite also holding adequate knowledge of many of the other sexual health topics required to teach broadly (see also Cohen et al., 2011). More specifically, the felt-sense of needed support was explicitly visualized by Malka as a form of protection. Malka had already been working as a sex educator in a country she described as “very traditional and patriarchal,” and was undertaking SHEC to learn ways to better navigate her own approach to CSHE (e.g., new framings and wording for addressing gender equality). Malka hoped that the learnings of SHEC—the glittery prisms seen in Figure 5—would allow her body to resist or at least withstand oppressive conditions.

**Figure 5**

*Malka – Body Map #1*



## **Interchange 2: Be/ing Schooled**

While the rights-based coupling with sex education provided a sense of empowerment and momentum, by embodying CSHE the novice educators started to notice and feel friction about the legal/political nature of the pedagogical approach and its entailed implications. A particular sense of “catching” was described by Aurora:

I wouldn't say that...not that it preached it, but it just felt like there was this kind of an undertone to it. And I couldn't quite put my finger on it. So, I am not sure we are as unbiased as we think we are in our stuff, right.

Aurora further articulated her sense of the nature of compulsory CSHE: value-neutral and evidenced-based content cannot not be conflated with de-politicized content. Although connecting to values like rights in CSHE, Aurora shared that it was disarming to realize that she was being “schooled” into a particular way of functioning, which is a sense that Llyr and Kaye also shared. This wasn't experienced as an explicit or obvious process, but rather felt like being apprenticed into a disciplinary practice of teaching.

Aurora: It kind of clicked in—is this a feeder program?

Kaye: ...in terms of sex educators?

Aurora: [Nods] But is it a feeder program without me knowing.

Llyr: Well, it's pretty clear that it is a feeder program. [Aurora frowns] We talk about the school boards. But this is what we are doing, right. We are getting tools to be able to function within a school program. I think.

Aurora: But is that what we want? That is not what we all want either...

While the educators recognized the value of CSHE's form of inclusive, neutral, rights-based discourse, the very enactment of the entailed forms of talk seemed to reinforce some educators' uneasy feelings of providing institutionalized, de-personalized teaching. Jasper visually captured this in their second-round body map. Jasper showed that even though they were getting “gold stars” for being an excellent educator through their classroom reviews, they still had sad feelings of being a “formulaic” or institutionalized sex educator who was lacking connections with individual students. This sense of institutionalization tainted their feelings of being a successful educator (gold stars turning blue with accompanying sad emojis) and reduced their enjoyment of teaching CSHE.

**Figure 6***Jasper – Body Map #2*

Malka similarly verbally expressed feeling frustration about institutionalization while working for a private CSHE organization that tailors its education to elementary school students. While the organizational environment was very positive overall, she found herself travelling a great deal and teaching with an organization script, which was required to ensure a consistent CSHE educational experience that hit specific talking points about rights and identities. Malka shared that the constraints of institutionalized sex education left her wanting more ownership of her teachings of CSHE. To combat this sense of pedagogical constraint, Malka described wanting to shift her educative focus:

Malka: And after moving here I decided that I wanted to do like a Canadian version of it because all the sexual health websites in Canada are U.S.-based. So that's actually something that I've been very excited to work on.

Kaye: Oh, that's cool.

Malka: Say if I had funding for that...I think I could quit teaching altogether and just focus on that. Because it has communication, it has marketing, it has social media like it brings in all the things together. So that's actually

something that I like, those things are grabbing my interest even more so than the teaching and working with the kids' aspect in Canada specifically.

Kaye: Yeah...really find opportunities to make impacts right?

As also evidenced in Malka's words, she felt as though she was more likely to see the impact she was having as an educator at the population level. Correspondingly, Malka was shifting her focus to providing digital, accessible education, to achieve a better sense of alignment between her actions and impacts. This thought was also echoed by Aurora, who, by the end of SHEC, felt strongly that the lasting impact she might be able to have was more likely to occur in institutions: "It's just more to me that people, that, I guess, I guess, part of it would be knowing that I made change in institutions [pause]...just for people regarding sexual health, right?" Mirroring CSHE's foundations, educators felt as though individual actions were subsumed within the institutionalization of sex education.

I also experienced feeling "trapped" at points navigating CSHE's pedagogical approach in my practice teaching because we learned to teach in a specific, institutional-feeling way. For me, a "value-neutral," evidence-based approach had previously prompted theoretical interrogation of the institutional and structural aspects of education that support and maintain discourses that regulate sexuality. It was by embodying CSHE that I gained a deeper understanding of the ways that we too were intersubjectively regulating and being regulated, even as we sought to reduce sexual regulation. As Thorogood (2000) has commented, "sex education is a technique of governance in the Foucauldian sense" (p. 426). Any changes which might significantly disturb the balance achieved through the interlocking components of CSHE are thus highly contentious and, with respect to governance, unlikely to occur. It was from this perspective that I interpreted the information provided below:



*SHEC Program Content – Parental Permissions*

*Information from SHEC: Can parents “opt out” of having their child learn sex education?*

*Answer: British Columbia (2018) has an “Alternative Delivery in the Physical and Health Education and Planning 10 Curricula” that notes there are “certain sensitive topics related to reproduction and sexuality that some students and their parents or guardians may feel more comfortable addressing by means other than instruction by a teacher in a regular classroom setting” (n.p.). All parents have the right to provide alternative sex education to their child. Accompanying that right, is the child’s right to have access to accurate, comprehensive sexual health knowledge. Learning standards still must be fulfilled. It is not possible to “opt-out” of the subject matter.*

*As a sex educator who may be supporting parents in this capacity, it is helpful to remind parents of the specific learning standards and to provide guidance in how they may fulfill those standards. It is useful to have 1) a summary of the standards for each grade they will need to meet, 2) a multitude of effective resources that parents can use to design their own sex education, and 3) sample assessments that can be employed to help demonstrate that their child has met the standards.*

I was struck that implementing the policy in this way could be intimidating for a parent, especially one who may be working with English as an additional language, have a lower formal education level, or favour using value-explicit, culturally appropriate sources of information to meet these requirements. This course of action may create a sense of disempowering opposition that pits individual parents against a well-established, interlocking system of governance and rights. Consequently, I felt as though students may remain in the classroom without further discussion or pedagogical adjustments that could improve connections with them and their families, as well as create conditions wherein the educator would engage in intersubjective processes of “schooling” students in ways contrary to personal and pedagogical anti-oppressive aims.

## **Implications of Interchange**

In this inquiry, I detailed insights from educators about navigating CSHE pedagogy in a Canadian context. Such inquiry is of heightened importance because sex educators remain curiously understudied in Canada (Action Canada, 2020; Ninomiya, 2010), including their relationships with the strengths and persistent challenges of CSHE outlined in the literature review. In response, I have offered nuanced analysis of the experiences of educators learning to teach CSHE—which I cast as the felt-sense of interchange.

Through a two-part compositional piece on interchange, I explored the felt-sense of interchange as akin to sandpapering, both smoothing and catching on the educators' selves in particular ways. I detailed that the sex educators all enrolled in the SHEC program because they were seeking guidance in how to best navigate delivering education about sexuality in a charged socio-political context of British Columbia and elsewhere. Evidenced through the first-round body maps and in my own body enaction description, it was through starting to take on the role of sex educator that abstract ideological divisions began to inform pedagogical navigation in personally resonant ways. As the educators learned how to navigate sexual education through providing CSHE, their initial felt-sense of unease and discomfort began to transform. The discursive construction of education about sexuality as a legally protected human right used in CSHE pedagogy provided the educators with empowering senses of support, momentum, and desired institutional protection. The educators felt confident that, should ideological disputes arise while educating, CSHE would provide appropriate framing and practices for addressing them (Feeling Right(s)). At the same time, some educators communicated that, despite being framed as neutral and non-biased, CSHE has a set of values and should not be treated as depoliticized pedagogy. Educators expressed feeling constrained and “schooled” in what they could teach, and how, using CSHE. Likewise, as the educators progressed from classroom training into working as educators during their practicum, they experienced some disconnection with learners. This was expressed via the senses of pedagogical institutionalization and de-personalization, including the educators' feeling as though they might be able to have more impact with CSHE at an institutional level, rather than an individual level. The frictions of CSHE cumulated in my reflections about how learners and their parents may be oppressed/“schooled” through particular enactments of British Columbia's provincial policy aimed at allowing choice in sexual education content (Be/ing Schooled).



Considering the implications of these findings for the patterned strengths and persistent challenges detailed in the literature review (e.g., Action Canada, 2020, Charest & Kleinplatz, 2021; Walters & Lavery, 2022), I extend the felt-sense of interchange by returning to Maclaren's (2018) notion of "unfreedom." Reflecting on how power does not merely constrain from the outside, but can transgress into experience to shape how educators perceive the world and self (Maclaren, 2018), the educators were frustrated in how they might define themselves as CSHE educators. Although the "sex educator" is popularly conceptualized to be a near-mythical figure—perhaps someone like Dr. Jean Milburn in the Netflix show *Sex Education* (Archard & Jennings, 2019–2023), who is a therapist-educator-parent-feminist-change-maker all at once—the educators quickly became aware of the limiting bounds they could teach within. Becoming a "smooth" sex educator delivering CSHE ultimately required working through frictions to determine what a given lesson could entail within institutional structures. As expressed through the two-part compositional piece, the educators became imposed on and imposing through CSHE pedagogy. The particularizing fragments of the pieces highlight how educators' selves are in ongoing, sometimes paradoxical dialogue with the demands of providing CSHE. The educators experienced being smoothed and roughed: appreciating systemic alignment with self, but recognizing how those institutions contribute to ideological domination; gaining effective pedagogical practices, but having one's own desires for teaching sidelined; and feeling the importance of one's individual actions subsumed within institutional foci. It became evident that these were significant frictions that remained unresolved as the sex educators strove to address the intense, unfree demands of providing CSHE in Canada, while also responding to their own personal values that motivate their anti-oppressive intentions as sex educators.

The implications of interchange also speak to key assumptions about teaching and learning of sexuality. Literature on sex education can, at times, overemphasize teachers' own failings in delivering CSHE or advocate for overhauls that involve educators developing different personal (or disciplinary) pedagogies (Koepsel, 2016). While I agree there is merit in continuing to interrogate existing and visionary possibilities for pedagogical approaches, the findings illustrate the importance of such inquiry fully connecting to the gritty context that contemporary educators operate within. Evidenced in the compositional piece, embodiments of CSHE pedagogy highlighted specifics of the intersubjectivity of sex education—reminding us that while CSHE is "institutional," it is always underta-

ken relationally in the presence and with the recognition of other beings. The findings of this inquiry ask academics and allies to acknowledge that the constraints of CSHE implicate our intersubjective bodies in the pedagogy's uneven enactments. In this study, educators who are very passionate and determined to provide evidence-informed, inclusive sex education (i.e., ones who have sought out gruelling, privately funded training in best practices) realize that when CSHE is delivered in an overly discursive, disembodied way for educators and learners, it can cause a profound loss of connection. The moments of friction that can be generative have been smoothed away through a pre-determined frame of rights and entitlements—resulting in a sexual “schooling.”

I argue that, when thinking about implications for pedagogical practices, the task becomes thinking about how intersubjective impositions in CSHE may promote, rather than hinder, the development of freedom. I find guidance in Maclaren's (2018) assertion that greater freedom in delivering CSHE can come through “owning up to the unfreedom” (p. 19). One such example highlighted in the findings was the British Columbia Ministry of Education's (2018) *Alternative Delivery in the Physical and Health Education and Planning 10 Curricula* policy, which allows for students to learn about sexuality in a setting provided by parents, although “opting out” altogether is not permitted in British Columbia. As highlighted through SHEC's suggested interpretation of the policy, sex educators' role is thus to provide the learning standards, resources, and assessments required by parents to conduct the learning themselves. A result, however, is that the process for an alternative delivery can be very intimidating for learners and their parents and will likely involve the learner remaining in the classroom. Here we can see that which does not fit within existing parameters of supported, rights-based CSHE practices can easily be excluded via Foucauldian mechanisms of governance (Thorogood, 2000). Attention to the educators' felt-sense becomes critical here because the policy's success relies on the educator (and school) genuinely recognizing its validity and attempting to provide resources and assessments that can bridge various understandings of sexuality—and, in the process, invoke more relational, contextual ways of educating using CSHE. I do not wish to suggest fulsome school-based sex education should not be provided to all, but urge for scholarly specificity in how inequalities and challenges persist despite best efforts. Continued attention given to how sex educators' body-based experiences shape the delivery of CSHE and link to wider societal topics may provide further insights about how educators are enmeshed with institutional supports and constraints, thereby helping identify additional CSHE pedagogical rubs that can be reconsidered.

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