A CASE FOR THE INTEGRATION OF COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION

Flavia S. Bonadeo *
ISP Nº 8 Almirante Guillermo Brown
Darío L. Banegas
University of Edinburgh
Pablo Berardo
ISP Nº 8 Almirante Guillermo Brown
Sabrina Monasterio
ISP Nº 8 Almirante Guillermo Brown
José Manuel Tomatis
ISP Nº 8 Almirante Guillermo Brown

ABSTRACT

Comprehensive sexuality education continues to gain ground in Argentina and across countries. Sitting at the intersection of initial teacher education and TESOL, the aim of this paper is to describe and reflect on the initiative carried out by a teacher educator who imbued an initial English language teacher education programme in Argentina with a gender perspectiveto respond to a national law, the UN and UNESCO calls for sustainable actions. The voices of the teacher educator and three student-teachers constitute the backbone of this article as they articulate their lived experiences.

Keywords: Teacher education – comprehensive sexuality education – curriculum innovation – material adaptation

RESUMEN

La educación sexual integral continúa ganando terreno en Argentina y otros países. En este artículo se articulan las miradas de la formación docente y de la enseñanza de inglés para describir y reflexionar acerca de un espacio opcional en un profesorado de Argentina que adopta una perspectiva de género para su propuesta teórico metodológica, y así responde a la normativa nacional y las propuestas de la ONU y la UNESCO en este sentido. Las voces de la docente a cargo de este espacio y de tres estudiantes que lo transitaron constituyen el eje principal del artículo.

Palabras claves: Formación docente – educación sexual integral – innovación curricular – adaptación de materiales

Corresponding author's email: flaviasb2@gmail.com

Introduction

Comprehensive sexuality education, henceforth CSE, continues to gain ground in Argentina and across countries. At the transnational level, two bodies have issued clear statements and policies which support CSE perspectives in education. As discussed in Maley and Peachey (2017), the United Nations (UN) launched in 2015 the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Adopted by all UN member states, the 17 SDG seek to end poverty, protect the planet, and improve living circumstances for all. Goal 5 aims to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" (p. 1). This goal recognises that women, solely based on their gender, are subjected to discrimination, violence, and exploitation. Aligned with this goal, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) promotes CSE based on scientific facts and evidence. UNESCO defines CSE as

> a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realize their health, well-being and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and, understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives" (UNESCO, 2018, p. 16).

Sitting at the intersection of initial teacher education and TESOL, the aim of this paper is to describe and reflect on the initiative carried out by a teacher educator who imbued an initial English language teacher education (IELTE) programme in Santa Fe (Argentina) with a gender perspective (this term is explained below) to respond to a national law, the UN and UNESCO calls for sustainable actions. The voices of the teacher educator and three student-teachers constitute the backbone of this article as they articulate their lived experiences.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education in TESOL

In TESOL, the relationship between gender, sexuality and English language learning and teaching has been examined drawing on poststructuralist, critical, feminist, and queer theories of language and applied linguistics (e.g., Baxter, 2013; Norton & Pavlenko, 2004). They coincide in understanding gender as a construct culturally shaped by dominant discursive practices but subject to transformations. Furthermore, they view comprehensive sexuality education as a site of struggle as well as plurality, and recognise that gender and sexuality play a crucial role in learning and teaching trajectories.

The recent literature shows that gender and sexuality in TESOL have been problematised in relation, but not limited to, identity construction and perceptions (e.g., Evripidou, 2018; Lawrence & Nagashima, 2020), the role of female scholars in patriarchal-influenced education (e.g., Nagamoto, 2016), heteronormativity and gender stereotypes and diversity (Cossu et al., 2021; Moore, 2020), masculinities (e.g., Appleby, 2014), or LGBTQ+ diversity and inclusion in TESOL pedagogies (e.g., Nelson, 2009; Paiz, 2019; Sauntson, 2020). While these issues focus on deconstructing naturalised discourse practices through reflection and informed discussion, Paiz (2018, 2019) has been particularly vocal about the implications that such issues have for TESOL teacher education. The author highlights that for a gender perspective to become a sustainable change, TESOL teacher preparation needs to be harnessed not only on readings to discuss gender but also on student-teacher support in the development of lesson plans or sequences, materials, and, above all, transformative pedagogies.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Argentinian teacher education: an example

In Argentina, including CSE across the curriculum in all levels of education, including teacher education, is not merely an option. Law 26,150 (Congreso de la Nación Argentina, 2006) establishes that learners have the right to receive CSE from a gender perspective. In this context, CSE may include topics such as "identity, gender relations, gender violence, sexuality and health, interpersonal relationships and respect, gender and human rights, sexual harassment, and the deconstruction of sociohistorical and cultural practices" (Banegas &Lauze, 2020, p. 200).

In the context of the broad agenda of CSE in Argentina, a gender perspective problematises how gender, sexuality and gender (in)equality and equity have an effect on people's roles, opportunities, socio-political participation, and access to resources (Benavidez, 2021; Morgade, 2017). By extension, a gender perspective hinges on the notion of gender pedagogy, i.e., a pedagogy that addresses gender inequality, deconstructs gender and sexuality as cultural constructs, and dismantles a patriarchal and heteronormative system which is reproduced as the norm (Benavidez, 2021; Ylöstalo & Brunila, 2018).

Although the law was passed in 2006, it is only recently that English language teaching with young learners has started to incorporate it in practice (e.g., Accardo, 2020; Banegas, 2021). Such explorations have been the result of teacher-initiated moves to enable learners to explore CSE while learning English. Albeit commendable, they are carried out by teachers individually and without much support, which makes such initiatives weak in terms of sustainability. Following Paiz's (2019) call for the need to prepare (future) teachers to create inclusive classrooms, we argue that IELTE programmes need to include a gender perspective in TESOL so that student-teachers experience first-hand how CSE can be embedded in the TESOL curriculum.

To this effect, below we describe an endeavour in a four-year IELTE programme in Santa Fe (Argentina) through which a new module was developed at students' request. The module in question is called "Materials adaptation and development: a case for the integration of CSE content" and it intends to give concrete form to Argentinian students' legal right to receive CSE education by exploring the potential and the shortcomings of mainstream materials, and giving guidelines and support to integrate CSE topics in teacher-developed materials.

This optional module adopts a workshop format: a number of tasks are proposed along the semester and there is an integrative presentation targeted at other student-teachers at the end of the term. The task construction process is scaffolded by some teacher-led activities, such as the presentation of current regulations and guidelines for the teaching of CSE in Argentina, the creation of a repository of theoretical and practical materials on the topic, and the guided analysis of ELT sequences including CSE content. Likewise, the student-teachers are given the opportunity to interview local experts in CSE, as well as politicians and activists who are CSE advocates.

For the sake of brevity, only one of the assigned tasks is described here, and some distinctions are made between the 2019 and the 2020 final outcome[1]. In 2019, this task involved the design of a lesson plan integrating CSE content; and the lesson was eventually presented to the class through a micro-teaching activity. Student-teachers worked in small groups and each group focused on a CSE theme; gender stereotypes in child rearing, healthy and unhealthy relationships and traditional gender roles were the themes selected. The themes, texts and tasks were chosen and developed having a particular group of learners in mind: the classes the student-teachers were teaching or had taught in the Practicum module.

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[1]While in 2019 the module also included some contents related to the integration of students with disabilities, the 2020 programme concentrated exclusively on CSE contents and was implemented wholly online because of the global pandemic.

The 2020 proposal was slightly different in the sense that, after analysing a set of coursebooks currently used in secondary education, student-teachers planned and designed new sequences to be added to a unit in one of the coursebooks to meet the aims and cover the contents of CSE. They thus focused on language functions and lexical sets typically taught in EFL classes, such as the family, physical description and habits and routines. Nonetheless, drawing from the key topics and learning objectives introduced in the UNESCO guidelines, the adjustments made were meant to develop awareness and acceptance of the different family structures, the uniqueness of each human body and the responsible use of social media.

The resulting sequences and lesson plans, both in 2019 and 2020, encompassed these features:

- an emphasis on the development of intercultural competence with a focus on identity construction and the identification and avoidance of binary, heteronormative-oriented gender roles and other stereotypes and prejudices
- the inclusion of authentic texts, such as clips from well-known cartoons and sitcoms, as well as TV advertisements, and infographics
- an emphasis on comprehension abilities (listening and reading)
- implicit presentation and/or practice of lexical and grammatical items
- a noticeable intent to involve learners through open-ended activities
- the use of translanguaging to engage students in joint reflection

The sequences developed in 2020 shared some other distinguishing features: they provide meaningful practice on the language items taught in the coursebook unit, and they provide students with opportunities to produce output through guided activities that intend to match their English language proficiency level.

In general, both 2019 and 2020 student-teachers agreed that the content and activities had fulfilled their expectations and that they were now eager to learn more about CSE implementation in schools. Their enthusiasm and receptiveness can be related, to some extent, to the fact that they had opted for this module, which had in turn been designed bearing in mind their interests and suggestions. The following section captures the voices of some of these student-teachers and displays their attempts to realise their own and their prospective students' right to receive CSE education. Qua vignettes, the three subsections are written in the first person singular as it is the student-teachers themselves who provide an account of their experience.

Student-teachers' texts, experiences and assessments
Integration of LGBTQIA+ characters in EFL material
(*José Manuel Tomatis*)

One of the reasons I chose this module relates to my secondary school experience since teachers used to present coursebooks that contained only heterosexual characters. Most coursebooks opt to introduce only heterosexual participants in their content leaving aside certain sexual/social minorities who are learning a second language with this material. I have realised that an LGBTQ+ student may not be interested or, even worse, involved in the classroom activities if a lesson unintentionally conceals diverse identities. So I noticed that engaging students in each lesson is a crucial factor not only to further their language learning process but also to give them a voice, and demonstrate that they are seen and that they can feel represented by thecharacters in the material. According to Gray (2013), the first step is questioning the coursebook content so as to adjust it for language students, and to show them a range of diverse social issues that they may concern them.

In the CSE module, throughout the semester, we were provided with helpful reading materials such as the UNESCO guidance and Lineamientos Curriculares about CSE. We also analyzed a coursebook and wondered what kind of CSE content we could include so the material becomes potentially interesting for students. Despite the integration of people of colour in the coursebook,

there is still a strong focus on the representation of heteronormativity rather than of sexual minorities. So my group and I became interested in the idea of how gender norms are established by society and how society itself can challenge them as well. We designed a sequence in which we integrated an unusual topic —*drag queens*—and prompted students to share their opinions about related themes and to reflect upon their own attitudes. To counteract the focus of textbooks on the lifestyles of first world countries, we decided to make the sequence meaningful, by including Latin American people's lifestyles, for instance, Pabllo Vittar from Brazil and La Queen from Argentina (see Gender Norms). With this inclusion we tried to break down gender stereotypes and to challenge gender norms. Moreover, we expect students to grasp how identities may not sometimes match people's biological sex and, therefore, the difference between sex and gender. Thus, learners can conclude that: (1) a male person, as Pabllo Vittar who dresses up like a "woman" and changes his pronouns to "she/her" during the weekend, can challenge completely what the norm dictates for a man; and (2) outfits and looks depend on people's desires and perceived identities instead of on biological sex and social conventions.

We also touched upon a fragile concept such as discrimination towards Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersexual, Asexual and non-cisgender (LGBTQIA+) people, introducing an interview to the Argentinean trapper La Queen who has suffered violence because of her sexual identity, social context and behaviour/attitude. As UNESCO (2018) states, in addition to being materially disadvantaged and socially excluded, poor children and young people are more likely to be exposed to violence than others. So our aim was to raise awareness of the violations of the singer's rights and encourage learners to recognize their own rights and respect those of others. Finishing the module, my group and I discerned that we, as teachers, should not see coursebooks as the source of our teaching, but as the motivation of our creativity. The inspiration comes from questioning the status quo to make the necessary additions and adjustments in order to further students' learning process and promote a more meaningful school experience.

Addressing CSE content using a coursebook
(*Sabrina Monasterio*)

During the second semester of 2020 I attended virtually the module "Materials adaptation and development: a case for the integration of CSE content". Along that period, I discovered new perspectives and ideas on how to implement CSE content using existing materials. What my classmates and I did along the module is, according to my teaching experience, doable and very coherent with the time constraints teachers usually have. At the beginning, it was difficult for me to see the connection between the CSE concepts stated in the UNESCO guidelines and the coursebooks we were using. However, after working cooperatively in a virtual lesson with some other materials such as comic strips, short videos, short stories and pictures, I understood that it is a matter of perspective, not of materials.

In my case, I worked with a classmate. Our work was based on a popular course book in secondary schools in Santa Fe, Engage Starter 2nd edition; we chose unit 6 "Work and play", where the language contents developed are simple present, routine actions and school subjects, and the CSE concepts we decided to include were relationships, understanding gender, and safe use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

We decided to adapt a reading activity to address the topic Safe use of ICT, which we considered is of paramount importance nowadays when adolescents (and adults too) are using social media not only for fun, but also for studying and working (see School life and online security). To accomplish our aim, we changed two texts about routines that were under the heading "Different countries, different lives" and included the routine of two well-known influencers, German Garmendia, from Chile, and Juli Castro, from Argentina. After the reading section there was a chart

where students had to analyse and classify statements into safe/unsafe use of the internet and social networks. The purpose of this analysis was to help students reflect on their behaviour in social networks, the importance of the digital footprint and privacy, and to raise awareness of the risks of sharing personal information and pictures.

To cover the CSE content related to relationships, we thought about friendship and families, and how different those categories can be. For that reason, we designed two related sequences, involving a speaking and a writing activity, based on the text "An extraordinary teenager" from the coursebook. The speaking activity was a video call between the adolescent from the text (Isaac) and a new cyber friend. Students were given some pictures and personal information of teenage students around the world who were Isaac's new cyber friends. Students had to pretend they were Isaac or one of his friends and exchange information about their routine and everyday life. For the writing activity, students had to imagine they were new in a school far away from their homes, and had to write an email to tell their families or friends about the first day at school, new routines and subjects.

Before attending the module, the inclusion of CSE content in the Foreign Language classroom was for me an impossible task, unless the material would have been designed specifically for that purpose. However, now I know that we can address the CSE concepts with the material we have, from coursebooks to pictures, series, songs, stories for young children or even a politician's speech.

"Don't ask me, I'm just a girl!":
learning to work with and against gender stereotypes in the EFL classroom
(Pablo Berardo)

When I decided to take this course, in 2019, during my fourth and final year in the English teacher education programme, CSE was already far from a new or niche topic, even in ELT. The fact that, a year before, CSE had been voted by students as the subject of one of the two optional modules that were opened that year reflected the growing interest in the matter —which I shared. Nevertheless, interest does not necessarily translate into knowledge and, personally speaking, I felt in the dark as to how these contents could or should be integrated into the English language curriculum. I hoped, then, to come out of this course with a clearer picture of how to approach CSE in the English language classroom.

The course itself took us through a number of tasks which culminated in the construction of our own CSE-themed lesson plan. Working as part of a small group with two other student-teachers (classmates' names to be added), we decided to tackle the issue of gender stereotypes by focusing on how toys have traditionally been (and continue to be) differentially marketed for boys and girls, adhering to and enforcing a rather strict gender binary. To highlight the insidious way in which these stereotypes are perpetuated, and the noxious effects they can have on the perception of individuals by themselves and others, we worked with clips from a Simpsons' episode ("Lisa vs. Malibu Stacy") in which Lisa, horrified by the sexist phrases uttered by the new speaking Malibu Stacy (the Simpsons-verse's Barbie equivalent), attempts to create her own non-sexist doll (see Be who you wanna be). Over the course of this lesson (planned with secondary-level students in mind), learners complete a series of activities that aim at helping them reflect on their own experience with gendered toys, identify and discuss the stereotypes implicit in Malibu Stacy's phrases and, finally, design and create their own talking doll or toy —as Lisa does—, with its own set of empowering or non-gender-typed phrases.

Although none of us have yet had the chance to implement or test this lesson plan, and thus can't exactly gauge its potential in real classroom conditions, I can only describe the entire experience as a success. First, it managed to demystify CSE, and proved not only that its implementation in ELT classrooms was within reach for even us inexperienced teachers, but also that potent learning experiences could be constructed out of it; experiences with potential for

changing students and teachers' perception of what learning a foreign language means. Additionally, opportunities for sharing, teaching and discussing our work with each other allowed us to come into contact with other —very creative and, to us, novel— ideas and ways of approaching the topic, which in turn brought to light the endless possibilities for creation at the intersection of CSE and ELT (and within ELT itself). In all, going forward, I can only look back on this module as a very meaningful contribution to my English teaching education, both with regards to Comprehensive Sexuality Education and language teaching in general.

Teacher educator's reflections

For teacher educators, the drive to adjust the curriculum so that it responds to interests, necessities or emergencies the student-teachers may have is a recurrent drive. However, they may be discouraged by factors such as lack of knowledge about the topic or issue in question, or by some conservative attitudes in the institution.

CSE was definitely not a subject I had studied as a student-teacher, or as a novice teacher-educator. I thus asked for advice from colleagues from other provinces where CSE was already a module in teacher preparation. Support and resources were also provided by former student-teachers, fellow teacher educators who were interested in CSE in TESOL, and teacher educators from other fields, as well as CSE local activists. They did not hesitate to join some of the module meetings and share their knowledge and expertise with the class. The CSE module thus became a joint endeavor.

I knew I counted with the undivided attention and committed work of those student-teachers who had visibilised the need to integrate CSE to their curriculum, but I was also aware of the fact that some student-teachers opted out of this module; their choice was guided by their personal pro-life stance. It is worth noticing that the 2018 debate about the legalisation of abortion in Argentina had divided the bulk of society into either supporters or opponents of CSE (Banegas, 2021).

The student-teachers' accounts seem to suggest that the module succeeded in providing the class with opportunities to find themselves and their interests represented in the curriculum, to localize global materials and align them to local regulations without excessive demands on their part and to make this happen by means of collaborative exploration and construction.

This brief but vivid journey confirmed my professional beliefs in three interrelated spheres: (1) the value of collaboration among practitioners and student-teachers, (2) the need for teacher preparation to be receptive to societal demands, and (3) the formative value of curriculum innovation processes as crossroads where hegemonic and resistance forces meet.

Conclusion

The incorporation of a gender perspective in IELTE has the potential of empowering student-teachers as future professionals to give concrete form to educational rights in their everyday practices. Ultimately, the CSE optional module purported to aid student-teachers in putting their pedagogical-content knowledge at the service of educational policies that acknowledge and protect their prospective students', as well as their own, identity and gender rights. Depending on contextual circumstances, CSE in IELTE could be channelled through specific modules and/or through interdisciplinary projects in which CSE contents are transversally addressed in various areas, from pedagogy to linguistics, to further strengthen the content-form connection in teacher education.

Aware that our argument may be in sharp contrast with personal beliefs or institutional missions and visions, we still encourage TESOL teacher educators to consider ways in which their IELTE practices can contribute to consolidate the national and transnational agenda on CSE.

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