Chapter 3

Navigating a bumpy road. Developing sexuality education that supports young people’s sexual agency

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Abstract

The complexity of young people’s strategic negotiations of sexual agency constitutes a challenge for professionals working in the area of sexuality education. This paper explores how comprehensive sexuality education can support young people to develop sexual agency in all its forms: embodied, bonded, narrative and moral. A first step is to base sexuality education on the recognition of the connectedness of young people to different people and to different sexual cultures. This implies that comprehensive sexuality education should provide the tools that can help young people in the process of taking up a position, forming an identity and embodying a sexual self within their own social and cultural context. Moreover, comprehensive sexuality education should not only be aimed at empowering individuals, but should address different sexual cultures, gender norms and other social norms, to stimulate critical consciousness and collective agency, and thereby create an environment that enables and supports young people’s agency and diminishes inequality and restrictive norms.

3.1 Introduction

Sexual agency is forged and expressed in context in young people's lives. The embeddedness of young people in their cultural and social environment and their bondedness to family and friends influences how they position themselves in relation to concepts of sexual identity, desire and practices. Based on qualitative studies among Dutch Youth with a great variety in cultural, gender and sexual identities, I have developed a four component model of sexual agency (Cense 2018) including (1) embodied agency, or the process by which young people develop sexual identities, desires and practices; (2) bonded agency, in the form of the strategies, actions and negotiations involved in maintaining relationships and navigating broader social expectations; (3) narrative agency, or the capacity to develop a life story that makes sense to their individual self; and (4) moral agency, which involves reflecting on and positioning oneself within a moral framework. Developing one’s sexual self in all these aspects within diverse social, cultural, narrative and moral landscapes is challenging for all young people, but even more for young people deviating from cultural ‘normalcy’, for instance by being non-heterosexual, gender fluid or transgender, or by not
conforming to the cultural ideas of being a ‘good girl’ or a ‘real man’. Running into trouble, like an unintended pregnancy or sexual victimisation, may also cause major friction in claiming embodied, bonded, narrative and moral agency. On the other hand, our study of teenage pregnancy (Cense and Ganzervoort 2018) showed how experiencing troubles may also be a turning point in one’s life, leading to the taking up of another social position and a strengthening of the agentic power of young people.

Drawing on this four component model of sexual agency, I conclude that current comprehensive sexuality education as it is practised in the multicultural context of the Netherlands can benefit from a deeper knowledge of how young people navigate different contexts. The principal question I will address in this paper is how sexuality education can meet the lived realities and actual challenges faced by young people with diverse backgrounds and affiliations, so that they can develop agency over their sexual identities and practices.

**The benefits and challenges of comprehensive sexuality education**

UNESCO (2018) defines comprehensive sexuality education (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: realise 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.

Studies show that good quality comprehensive sexuality education has great potential to provide young people with the necessary information about their bodies and sexuality; to reduce misinformation, shame and anxiety; and to improve their abilities to make safe and informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health (Boonstra 2011; Vanwesenbeeck et al. 2016). It also provides opportunities for young people to develop positive values, including respect for human rights, gender equality and diversity, and attitudes and skills that contribute to safe, healthy, positive relationships (UNESCO 2018).

However, because sexuality education is immersed in the values, ideas and stereotypes of the dominant culture, it also runs the risk of reinforcing and reinscribing inequalities (Smith 2012). Sexuality education can also be viewed as serving to tame the unruliness of sexuality (Gilbert 2017) and correcting the ‘misplaced’ sexual socialisation of young people (Smith 2012). There is therefore a strong relationship between the content of sex education and the dominant sexual culture. Sexual culture is closely linked to the various ways sexuality is depicted, expressed, practised and understood, including how sexual knowledge is constructed (Mukoro, 2017a). Its immersion within dominant culture leads to several problems. Firstly, the dominant sexual culture in the Netherlands, as in most other countries, portrays heterosexuality as what is ‘normal’. Gender and sexual diversity are treated as matters for social acceptance and tolerance, while
‘normalcy’ are reserved for heterosexual sexuality, which leads to the widespread Othering of non-heterosexual people (van Lisdonk, Nencel, and Keuzenkamp 2017, Meerhoff 2016). Secondly, sexuality education builds upon presumptions and stereotypes that reproduce existing sexist, racist and classist notions of sexuality, thereby ‘projecting a particular message and vision of who and how teens are and should be’ (Bay-Cheng 2003, p.61). Young women of colour are often portrayed in the media as hypersexualised, and sex education often describes the sexual attitudes and behaviour of ethnic minorities as problematic in comparison to White youth (Garcia 2009, Lamb, Roberts, and Plocha 2016). These socially constructed ideas of gender and culture impact on how young women of colour perceive themselves (Hunter 2002). Paradoxically, girls (and boys) of colour may construe White girls similarly, viewing them as promiscuous while positioning themselves as respectable and virtuous (Lamb, Roberts, and Plocha 2016, Weekes 2002). Both of these processes compound and reinforce Othering. Thirdly, many of the ideals of sexuality education, such as its concern for personal autonomy and sexual freedom, are based on a secular logic, excluding people and practices shaped from within a religious framework (Rasmussen 2012; Roodsaz 2018). Rasmussen (2010, p. 456), in particular, has argued that comprehensive sexuality education perpetuates a problematic binary between ‘progressive secular’ and ‘backward religious/conservative’ perspectives:

.. if sex education is to have relevance to young people it must reflect and engage the diverse contexts from which these young people come, even when these contexts cannot be easily reconciled. Which is not to say that young people should only be exposed to one set of values, according to their religious, sexual or ethnic identification. Rather, I argue that secularism, like religion, is steeped in particular value judgements about what constitutes a quality sex education.

Race, ethnicity, culture and religion are repeatedly depicted in sexuality education courses and materials as factors that hamper individual agency or diversity of opinion, on the assumption that they are synonymous with opposition to teaching and learning in sexuality education (Whitten and Sethna 2014). Haggis and Mulholland (2014, p. 57) also highlight the

.... tendency in sex education research to treat difference as a set of categories to be ‘tacked on’, such as religious difference, cultural difference and sexual plurality. The danger of this is that it leaves the normative unchallenged, confirming the hegemony of the heteronormative, unraced subject.

Reinforcing stereotypical images of culture or religion will not only exclude young people from minority backgrounds but will also strengthen the group identities of both liberal and religious youth thereby creating a greater sense of dichotomy or difference. Ideas about sexual freedom and homosexuality on the one hand, and virtue and virginity on the other, tend to act as identity
markers, distinguishing the stance of particular religious groups from those of secular society (Ganzevoort, van der Laan and Olsman 2011).

Comprehensive sexuality education in the Netherlands
Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) has been mandatory in Dutch primary and secondary schools since 2012. This means that pupils aged 4 to 18 must receive sexuality education at school. Dutch people have a generally positive attitude towards sexuality education in schools. Nine out of ten people think that it should be compulsory (De Graaf and Wijsen 2017). This point of view reflects the dominant cultural logic of the Netherlands, which normalises and accepts adolescent sexuality and views teenagers as sexual agents who can choose for themselves when they are ready to engage in sexual activities, so long as this happens in the context of a more or less equal relationship, practicing safe sex, and without coercion (Schalet 2000). As in most Western countries, contemporary public discourse in the Netherlands is dominated by a (neo)liberal sexual culture, based on the sexual rights of individuals. Notions such as responsibility (for oneself, for young people, for partners, for the family and for society) are crucial to arguments within and about sex education (Rasmussen 2010). Responsibility is emphasised through the repeated message: if you are going to have sex, do it safely. This encourages the provision of information about safe and unsafe sex, different types of contraceptives, where to obtain contraceptives, how to use them, and how to negotiate protection against STIs and pregnancy with your partner (Ferguson, Vanwesenbeeck, and Knijn 2008). In 2012, the Dutch Ministry of Education included sexuality education in the Key Objectives of Education. This Resolution supports CSE for Primary Schools and Lower Secondary Education.

Pupils learn about similarities, differences and changes in culture and philosophy in the Netherlands, learn to see the relationship between their own lifestyle and that of others, learn to see the importance for society of having respect for one another’s views and lifestyles, and learn to deal respectfully with sexuality and diversity within society, including sexual diversity (Resolution Key Objectives Education 2012, objective 43).

However, the Dutch constitutional principle of freedom of education creates a barrier to implementation, as Dutch schools are free to determine the amount of time, the approach and the methods they use for sexuality education. A recent survey among young people showed that although almost everyone reported having received some information about sexuality at school, this information usually focused only on contraception, reproduction and STIs/HIV (De Graaf et al. 2017). When it comes to sexual coercion, gender and sexual diversity, sexual pleasure, and sex in the media, a majority of young people report having received no or little information (De Graaf et al. 2017). Young people rate the sexuality education they have received at school as mediocre (5.8 on a scale of one to ten). So, although national guidelines exist, the practice of delivering comprehensive sexuality education is still rather limited.
Most sexuality education materials in the Netherlands are based on psychological approaches to health promotion. This is connected to the way sexuality education is funded and framed by the Ministry of Health. Sexual health promotion is often informed by models of health behaviour, such as Ajzen and Fishbein’s theory of reasoned action (2000), which are based on the notion that individual cognitive factors such as response-efficacy and self-efficacy, risk perception, and the perceived costs and benefits of the protective response influence the motivation or intention to protect oneself, which in turn influences actual behaviour (Vanwesenbeeck et al. 1999). However, critical Dutch scholars have argued over the years that sexual health behaviour should be addressed beyond the level of the individual, as there are few health behaviours so sensitive to context and interaction as sexual health behaviour (Vanwesenbeeck et al. 1999). These criticisms, together with growing concern about sexual coercion and the political urge to promote the social acceptance of gender and sexual diversity, have resulted in the development of new sexuality education materials that address the need for mutual respect and sexual communication, and seek to reduce sexual prejudice (De Graaf et al. 2016; Mevissen et al. 2017; Van Lieshout et al. 2016). However, most of these methods are still based on an individualistic approach and do not take ‘collective sensibilities’ (Rasmussen 2010) into account, nor do they question normative discourse. Thus, current Dutch sexuality education advances a morality in line with the liberal sexual rights discourse. By presenting this morality as the only one available, sexuality education excludes young people who grow up in a cultural environment that embraces other values and moral position, for instance by stressing sexual abstinence before marriage or rules about family honour. By using narrowly defined ideas of gender and sexual identity and by disconnecting sexuality from cultural and religious influences, sexuality education excludes the many young people who do not recognise themselves in the stories presented (Rutten and Theewis 2017).

3.2 New directions for comprehensive sexuality education

How can we develop sexuality education that is relevant to young people’s lives and takes context and strategic negotiations into account? In order to do so, I propose to expand the goals and activities of sexuality education to support young people, in all diversity, to develop sexual agency in each of the four forms highlighted earlier: embodied, bonded, moral and narrative agency. To reach this goal, sex educators should recognise and value the fact that young people are constantly negotiating their position within the social and normative landscape that surrounds them and no longer view sexual agency as merely autonomous decision-making. CSE should therefore move away from its narrow individualistic focus on danger and risk towards a broader view of sexuality as a domain for adventure and exploration (Fine and McClelland 2006; Naezer 2017) and subjectivity and morality (Allen and Carmody 2012; Lamb 2010).

In order to take young people’s circumstances into account, CSE should not only be based upon psychological models that focus on improving individual knowledge, attitudes and skills in order to make healthy
choices, but on a framework that views and acknowledges sexuality as a social and moral domain. Here, I propose four pillars for CSE that can support young people to develop embodied, bonded, narrative and moral agency.

**Figure 1 What Comprehensive Sexuality Education should provide**

First, by addressing different sexual cultures, gender norms and other social norms within the classroom, this newly comprehensive form of sexuality education will stimulate reflection and critical consciousness. In doing so, CSE can create an environment in which young people feel invited to take up a position, form an identity and embody a sexual self. These reflections will support both their embodied and their moral agency. Sexual cultures are temporary and changeable and should be considered as sites of participation, negotiation, reproduction, resistance and challenge (Attwood and Smith 2011). Second, using real-life scenario’s which do not mask the conflicts and the troubles that can be present in relationships and sexuality will support young people in gaining navigation skills and prepare for the challenges in real life. By emphasising that one learns about oneself and others by doing, and reframing ‘mistakes’ or ‘failures’ to learning experiences, CSE can provide a counterbalance to the neoliberal pressure to be successful and make the right choices. Third, to support young people in their bonded agency, educators should actively invite young people to explore their relationships to parents, peers and lovers. By recognising multiple desires including the desire to fit in and belong to a community or family, instead of striving for individual autonomy, young people can better learn to navigate social expectations and social pressures, and develop reciprocity in relationships. Finally, by providing multiple, different stories of
sexual identities and practices, CSE will support young people in developing narrative agency. I elaborate on these four pillars below.

**Stimulate critical awareness to support embodied and moral agency**
Supporting young people to reflect on themselves as sexual beings should be at the heart of comprehensive sexuality education. ‘Sexual subjectivity is a necessary component of sexual agency, that affects her/his ability to act in the world and to feel like she/he can will things and make them happen’ (Martin 1996, p.10, quoted in Tolman 2002, p. 6). It is closely connected to critical awareness of the influence of culture: ‘[for young people] to reflect on themselves as sexual beings would also mean reflecting on the cultural pressures to be this or that kind of sexual being and to reflect on one’s fears about, outrage at, and compliance to these cultural sexual norms’ (Lamb 1997, p. 303). It is crucial therefore to examine how race and class as well as region and religion intersect to form the cultural bounds within which individuals make meaning of their sexual and gendered selves (Sears 1997).

In addition, young people’s understanding of the normative landscape and the background of different moral messages around them is important to develop their own morality (Lamb, Roberts and Plocha 2016). When provided appropriately, good quality CSE can stimulate critical reflection on the diversity of sexual cultures (including liberal sexual culture) and corresponding values and feelings (such as concepts of the self, of loyalty, honour, freedom, holiness, equity etc.) and one’s own position in these. Sexuality education should be framed and taught from the perspective of the diversity of sexual cultures in society and should be responsive to this complexity of diversity (Mukoro 2017a). As Rasmussen (2010) has put it, ‘The answer to this diversity is not recourse to a ‘simple culturalism’ founded on the idea that there are discrete communities with discernible borders.’ (p. 710). Current approaches to cultural sensitivity may lead to stereotyped images of cultures and especially of people of colour (Whitten and Sethna 2014), which deny the dynamic nature of cultures and the multiple positions individuals can take up within them. Moreover, an intercultural approach in which each culture is treated as equal may ‘lead to a certain nihilism or the annihilation of cultural values, even the very good ones of respect and consent’ (Mukoro 2017a, p. 506) and to acceptance of, for instance, homophobia and gender inequity. The aim, therefore, should be to stimulate an open-cultural stance (Mukoro 2017a) that enables young people to navigate plural sexual cultures while at the same time firmly embedding sexuality education in a framework of gender equality and human rights (UNESCO 2018).

Gender role socialisation and gender equity are crucial elements in CSE, inviting young people to look critically at gender norms and gender inequality for both girls and boys, including ideals/codes of femininity and masculinity (Lamb 1997, Tolman 2012). Furthermore, removing discourses of shame and blame will enable conditions for young men’s and women’s sexuality development and well-being (Tolman 2012).

By encouraging and building on this joint reflection of social norms and stigma, the classroom can become a safe space in which differences between young people can be explored and the judging of others can be
reduced. This is important in order to reduce the exclusion of minorities, but also to diminish the reproduction of defensive strategies of positioning oneself as good by putting others down. Moreover, reflection on their own cultural background will enable young people to position themselves within the larger social landscape around them thereby developing moral and embodied agency.

**Show young people the bumpy road and enhance navigating skills to support embodied agency**

Young people learn about their sexual selves by doing, observing and sharing experiences. Learning about sexuality is not just a matter of education but is an ongoing process based on experiences in daily life. Young people learn about sexuality through films, conversation, sexting, jokes and silences, all of which influence the way in which sexuality is enacted and understood.

Pupils collectively learn how to do sexuality, ranging from where and how to talk and laugh about it, to the visualisation of growing up based on pictures on their smartphones, to remarks on breast-size or (the absence of) sexual behaviour (Krebekx 2018, p. 97)

Young people growing up in neoliberal cultures are often pressured to make a success of their life and make the right choices, especially in the domain of sexuality (Bay-Cheng 2015). CSE should not reinforce these messages but should instead teach that all people learn sexuality and relationships by doing, that there is no such thing as succeeding in your sexual or romantic ‘career’, and that messiness and trouble are an inherent part of discovering who you are and what you want to be.

By taking up the challenge to present learning stories instead of giving instructions for a risk free love life, CSE can diminish feelings of blame and shame and reduce the shaming of others. Gilbert (2017, p. 10) challenges the developers of sexuality education to create more space for adventure: ‘We will have to begin with a conceptualisation of sexuality that ventures into the realms of surprise, uncertainty, ambivalence, love and violence’. How then can comprehensive sexuality education prepare young people to deal with the unexpected obstacles they encounter on their journey? Mukoro (2017b) advocates for a sexuality education that can help young people prepare for conflict when they encounter it, instead of giving them rules that often will not work in the complexity of real-life situations. Young people can be taught to navigate conflicts by building sexuality education around case studies that highlight the existence of conflict in choices or decision making concerning sexuality. This education should involve highlighting the plurality of available options, analysing these options, making a decision based on these options, and finally reflecting upon this decision while being aware of the inherent limitations associated with the choice that has been made (Mukoro, 2017b).

Conceptualising sexuality as an adventure also opens up the possibility of including desire and sexual pleasure. Writers and researchers have long advocated for the inclusion of a discourse of pleasure in sexuality education to enhance young people’s sexual agency (Allen 2012, Fine and
McClelland 2006). Michelle Fine (1988) argued that young women were denied a sense of entitlement to desire and pleasure, impairing their ability to initiate and negotiate sexual activity. A pleasure discourse advances ‘female adolescents as [the] subjects of sexuality, [and the] initiators as well as negotiators’ (Fine 1988, p. 33). Allen (2012) adds that a discourse of desire and pleasure can enhance young people’s experience of sexuality and support a wider shift in understanding that sexual health is about much more than being disease-free.

**Support the development of reciprocity and response-ability to support bonded agency**

Inviting young people to explore different sources of bondedness will support their reflection on different relationships and social expectations. Among the questions to be asked in this respect are: who is most important and how do relationships work out; how best can one recognise social pressure and coercion; and how is it possible to navigate different social expectations of peers and family? Successful strategies involve young people learning from other young people about different ways in which to navigate social expectations. By paying more attention to becoming a partner in a relationship - instead of merely focusing on individual needs - new social norms such as reciprocity and response-ability - the ability to respond (Pham 2013) may be engendered. An inspiring example is given by Carmody and Ovenden (2013), who describe the effects of the Sex and Ethics Violence Prevention Program which provides young women and men with opportunities to engage with ‘real life’ scenarios and to explore alternative ways of negotiating sexual intimacy. Their research findings indicate that as a result of the programme heterosexual women were able to reshape their expectations about sexual intimacy and young men restyled their own traditional gender performances.

Connected to the issue of reciprocity is the issue of sexual consent. The rationale is that if young people learn that both parties should affirmatively communicate their willingness to have sex this could reduce sexual violence and coercion. However, consent is often not as straightforward as it seems. Again, as Carmody and Ovenden (2013, p. 802) point out, consent is a dynamic and continuous ‘process of mutual negotiation rather than a one-off agreement’. During sexual interactions, partners are not simply trying to translate sexual desire into sexual behaviour. Instead, people may want and simultaneously not want to engage in a sexual interaction for a host of reasons, whether sexual (e.g. arousal, curiosity) or not (e.g. to maintain a relationship). Gendered norms and conditions complicate and muddy this process of negotiation in many ways (Cense, Bay-Cheng and Van Dijk 2018). Gilbert (2017) raises the question of what the current tendency to include sexual consent in sexuality education brings with it, when she writes, ‘What happens in and to education when we frame the sexual encounter through the law? What conceptual baggage does consent smuggle into sex education – its desires, disappointments, ambivalences and losses?’ (Gilbert 2017, p. 2).
Provide young people with multiple stories to support narrative agency

Instead of offering a single story – in most sexuality education the story of a monogamous, heterosexual relationship – the provision of multiple accounts can show young people more diversity in identities and choices to identify with. The availability of a range of different stories will support young people in developing narrative agency. As Allen (2005) has written, ‘Other people’s stories are powerful, they suggest reality not fiction, and offer young people tangible and personal “proof” of what things are really like’ (p.396). Naezer (2017, p. 720) concludes from her study of Dutch youth, ‘Finding people who are able and willing to confirm the “normalcy” of certain feelings, experiences and identifications requires the availability of a multitude of perspectives; a requirement that is absent from Dutch sex educational policies.’

Sexuality education should therefore transgress the hegemonic stories of sexuality (heterosexuality, liberal views about sexuality) by including narratives from sexual and gender minorities and religious youth and accounts that counter the image of neoliberal success, such as stories of abortion, teenage pregnancy and abuse. By providing young people with multiple experiences with which to associate, they are given discursive weapons to oppose hegemonic systems (Butler 2002). Young people’s own voices are important to be heard in telling these stories in order to position them as agents who negotiate sexual experiences and discourses (Naezer 2017).

3.3 Discussion

In this article, I have proposed a model for Comprehensive Sexuality Education composed of four pillars aimed at supporting young people’s sexual agency in all its forms. The model was developed in response to an analysis of the way in which young people negotiate sexual agency in a social, moral and narrative environment. As the young people whose experiences drawn upon here live in the Netherlands, both the analysis of their agency and the proposed model for CSE are embedded in the Dutch socio-cultural context, characterised by a generally accepting attitude towards young people’s sexuality, liberal ideals such as individual freedom and responsibility, a largely psychological approach to sexuality education, and a latent but persistent heteronormativity, xenophobia and sexual double standard. However, as the model of sexual agency was based on fieldwork involving participants from a wide range of cultural backgrounds (Cense 2014; Cense and Ganzevoort 2017; Cense, Bay-Cheng and van Dijk 2018; Cense and Ganzevoort 2018), I argue that the analysis of the four components embodied, bonded, moral and narrative agency has relevance beyond the borders of the Netherlands.

In this article I have also argued that the complexity of young people’s strategic negotiations requires a change in sexuality education to meet the lived realities and actual challenges facing young people with diverse backgrounds and affiliations, to support them in developing agency over their sexual selves. It is crucial therefore to view sexual agency in the full multisystemic context of personal desires, interpersonal dynamics,
available narratives, social norms and social inequities. A first step in doing so is to base sexuality education on the recognition of young people’s bondedness to different people and to different sexual cultures, which means they have to negotiate their choices in the context of a wide range of expectations and emotions. Moreover, the choice that is ‘best’ for them is not fixed but can vary according to their specific situation at a specific moment in time. This implies that comprehensive sexuality education should provide the tools that can help young people with the process of taking up a position, forming an identity and embodying a sexual self, while recognising their own social and cultural context. Moreover, comprehensive sexuality education should be aimed not only at empowering individuals, but addressing different sexual cultures, gender norms and other social norms in order to stimulate critical consciousness and collective agency, thereby creating an enabling environment.

However, some potential problems of this ambitious project are worth noting. First, classrooms are imbued with social dynamics which take place alongside sexuality education. What effects do these dynamics have on what young people learn while receiving sexuality education? And can classrooms be a safe space for young people who take up a minority position because they identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender or because they differ from the majority because of other reasons, such as their religious or cultural background or the trouble they have run into over teenage pregnancy or abuse? Moreover, how can sexuality education avoid increasing the vulnerability of young people with regard to their peers? Lamb, Roberts and Plochoa (2016) found for instance that although students may want sex education classes to teach them about pleasure, it is also a topic that makes them feel vulnerable, which causes resistance to the lessons.

Beyond this, what happens if we change our approach to sexuality education within an unchanged, dominant sexual culture? How can young people relate to education that deviates from the messages that surround them, in media, music and online? Lamb, Roberts and Plochoa (2016, p. 48) found that girls of colour resisted feminist lessons for several reasons. They write how, ‘Introducing a discourse around critical consciousness, solidarity, the blaming of social forces and activism (…), hit up against a discourse of self-protection through pride and respect, a religious discourse of respectability, and an individualising discourse.’

And what does this new approach ask of educators? Educators may feel insecure about the challenge of taking up a different position in sexuality education and resist the required shift from the one who knows and explains to the one who asks questions and invites pupils to reflect. The kind of sexuality education that the presented model promotes requires educators to develop skills in nurturing open and thoughtful dialogue in class, from an early age onwards. Schools may not be the perfect places for these open dialogues, as formal education is built on more static ideas of what knowledge entails and what competences a teacher needs. However, contemporary innovation in education places stress on coaching and development so students may become competent citizens in a modern society (Geijssel and Meijers 2005, Van de Werfhorst 2014). Moreover, in the Netherlands today schools are obliged to support their pupils in developing
'citizenship competences', defined by Geijsel et al. (2012) as the knowledge, skills, attitudes and reflection needed by young people to fulfil social tasks that are part of daily life in a democratic and multicultural society. These new developments offer opportunities for the implementation of the model and to strengthen the development of ‘sexual citizenship’ in a broader sense1. A sexual citizenship framework can serve as a sensitizing tool for parents, teachers and policy-makers alike (Illes 2012). Developing sexual citizenship can also be used strategically to promote sexuality education starting at a young age, as children and adolescents below the age of 16 are already involved in many sexual ‘social tasks’, like falling in love and posting sexy selfies. However, the discourse of the innocent, asexual child who should be protected from sexuality, and sexuality education for that matter, is a barrier to implementing sexuality education, in Dutch society as much as elsewhere (Robinson 2012). Broadening sexual agency beyond the embodiment of sexual practices to include moral and narrative agency clarifies the urgency to start when children grow up, observe others, listen to stories of older youth, and develop their identities.

Additionally, there exist opportunities for delivering sexuality education outside of formal classroom settings. These range from youth clubs, sport clubs and hairdressing salons to community drama and media events (IPPF, 2010). Increased access to online media, the application of gamification to CSE and online information sources also numerous new opportunities for CSE.

That said, the implementation of the four pillars within this model will be a challenge, in the Netherlands and elsewhere. Opposition is to be expected from different sides. First, there will certainly be conservative opposition to viewing adolescents as sexual agents, who negotiate sexuality and have valuable knowledge of navigating skills to share with their peers. Moreover, the presentation of sexuality as an adventure rather than an avoidable risk will provoke resistance, as will the inclusion of gender equity and changing gender norms as a necessary part of sexuality education. But it is not unlikely that liberal sexuality education advocates will also resist the model, for different reasons. The idea of presenting multiple sexual cultures and encouraging an open-minded attitude towards values that conflict with sexual rights will likely not be met with applause. Sexual rights advocates may question the concept of bonded agency as it conflicts with ideas of individual freedom, choice and self-determination. The view that young people can also benefit from reflecting on and distancing themselves from liberal norms such as individual responsibility and striving for success, will not be shared by everyone.

Moreover, if we strive for a sexuality education that is open to a diversity of sexual cultures, that stimulates a reflexive attitude towards gender norms and heteronormativity, that transgresses hegemonic sexual stories and enhances response-ability and navigation skills, are we perhaps asking ‘too much of sex education’ (Gilbert 2017)? Hopefully not. While comprehensive sexuality education cannot be the panacea for all the world’s injustices and problems, it can be a site in which social change begins and new perspectives on sexuality can be shared. The perspective on

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1 See Richardson (2017) for a critical analysis of this multi-faceted concept.
contextualised sexual agency offered by studying young people’s life stories challenges sex educators to broaden the scope of sexuality education beyond lessons in individual decision-making to addressing norms collectively, and offering learning opportunities that can truly empower young people to develop their gendered and sexual selves, in all their many aspects.