

Gendering the foundation: Teaching sexuality amid sexual danger and gender inequalities

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How might Life Skills be conceptualised in the Foundation Phase of schooling when a tradition of feminist literature has revealed the regulation, denial and the silencing of both gender and sexuality in early childhood? This article presents one Grade 2 teacher's perspective of addressing sexuality education in an impoverished township primary school. Disrupting the tradition of sexual silencing, the teacher indicates that her teaching of sexuality focuses on bad touch and sexual danger, about and against violent masculinities, while promoting respectable and equitable gender relations. The disruption is an effect of the teacher's recognition of the gendered patterns of boys and girls classroom practice operating amid the broader climate of brutal township poverty, overcrowding, sexual violence and cultural norms that constrain women's and girls' agency. Nonetheless, the ability of the teacher to say 'sex' and to address cultural norms that tie women and girls into bonds of inequalities suggest limits to transforming gender relations and inequalities through sexuality education in the Foundation Phase without recognition of broader context. As such, it provides warrant for supporting teachers in the Foundation Phase to build on disruptive potentials in Life Skills sexuality education which is gender-focused, interrogative of the personal, locally relevant and disruptive of cultural norms.

Key words: Foundation Phase, Life Skills, sexuality education, teachers, sexual innocence, gender inequalities, social context

Introduction

... you respect the girls, you don't hit, you respect the girls. You are not allowed to touch the girls, you are not allowed to hit the girls, you are not allowed to take the uniform like this ... because other boys will do like this to the girls ...

[In-depth interview with a Grade 2 female teacher, Mrs Z, in an impoverished township primary school, KwaDabeka, in KwaZulu-Natal]

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In South Africa, four study areas comprise Life Skills in the Foundation Phase as indicated by the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS): Beginning Knowledge, Personal and Social Well-being, Creative Arts and Physical Education (Department of Basic Education, 2011: 13). Life Skills in the Foundation Phase aims at equipping young learners with knowledge that will allow them to improve their understandings of personal health and safety, and social relationships. Life Skills includes a focus on violence, abuse and safety within the broader ambit of rights and respect for others as sanctioned in the Constitution. It brings attention to the integration of gender, inequality, social and personal development of young learners but avoids the words 'sex' and 'sexuality'. Sexuality is not visible in CAPS, but it permeates the gendering of schooling experience where girls remain vulnerable to violence and harassment (Human Rights Watch, 2001). UNESCO (2009) notes the significance of addressing sexuality and gender issues in all stages of schooling (Blaise, 2009; MacNaughton, 2000; Baxen & Bredlid, 2009). In developing this focus, this paper draws on the testimony of one teacher, Mrs Z, and highlights the inadequacies of Life Skills in the Foundation Phase for its failure to explicitly locate sexuality education within the broader context of gender inequitable relations. Along these lines, the paper brings attention to developing interventions in the Foundation Phase that take heed of gender relations and sexuality, and children's active participation in gendered and sexual cultures in order to transform the current context of gender and sexual harassment.

This paper asks: How might gender and sexuality feature in the teaching of Life Skills in the Foundation Phase (Grade 1-3) of schooling when a tradition of feminist literature has revealed that dominant teaching discourses in early childhood often frame children as asexual and degendered (MacNaughton, 2000; Bhana, 2003)? The highly charged gendered environment in the early childhood classroom is often overlooked because of dominant framings of children as sexually innocent, resulting in the invisibility of gendered relations of power and inequalities (Keddie, 2003). The discourse of sexual innocence has resulted in minimum attention to the Foundation Phase in relation to sexuality education (Bhana, 2007). Disrupting this tradition, a Grade 2 female teacher, located in an impoverished primary school, responds by focusing on gender dynamics within her classroom context, recognising male power and violence, where boys are, according to Mrs Z, the main perpetrators of 'touching, hitting and taking from girls'. Research in the West indicates that gender violence in schools and classrooms remains pervasive: 'A discourse of entitlement prevails in terms of many boys' continued domination of classroom and playground space and resources; domination of teacher time and attention; and perpetration of sexual, misogynistic and homophobic harassment' (Keddie, 2009: 3).

In South Africa, like elsewhere in the world, there is wide acknowledgement that schools are not only sites where sexual violence and gender inequalities are produced, but also places for educational reflection and interrogation of such inequalities (Human Rights Watch, 2001). In the Foundation Phase of schooling there

is limited knowledge and intervention around any of these issues with great silence regarding sexuality and sexuality education (Bhana, 2007).

By drawing on the perspective of one teacher in the Foundation Phase, this paper seeks to understand how gender power dynamics are possibly connected to and influence Life Skills. It seeks to do so in a phase of schooling which is missing from and/or marginalised within the analysis of sexuality education (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Blaise, 2009; Alldred & David, 2007; Renold, 2005; Bhana, 2007). Unlike other research showing how South African teachers are often blind to the social and gendered structures of learners' experiences (DePalma & Francis, 2014), this paper draws attention to Mrs Z's recognition of gender and sexuality as they intersect with race and class inequalities. Beyond recognition, the paper is alert to the teacher's interweaving focus on sexual danger and 'bad touch,' the classroom as a space for the enactment of gender and sexuality, and the entrenchment of cultural ideals that place power in the 'man as the head of the household'. These issues are intimately connected to broader social realities where cultural norms, sexual violence, and gender ideologies combine with brutal poverty to produce vulnerabilities for girls and women.

The female teacher is not separate from the larger cultural organisation of gender. In particular, the teacher's narrative brings to light the powerful ways in which gender and sexuality feature in the Foundation Phase of schooling which are both enabling and constraining. As such, the paper provides warrant for supporting teachers in the Foundation Phase to build on disruptive potentials for teaching sexuality in Life Skills which is gender-focused and locally relevant.

Theoretical note

The paper draws on theoretical approaches developed within the sociology of childhood which suggest that the study of childhood and sexuality is missing/marginalised because of the way in which adult-child power relations are constituted within the realm of sexuality where children are regarded as powerless in relation to adults (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). Children are deemed to be sexually innocent, their knowledge of sexuality is denied and restricted, and a protectionist discourse views children as victims of, and vulnerable to, sexuality (Prinsloo & Moletsane, 2013, Renold, 2005; Allen, 2005; Tobin, 1997; Robinson, 2012). Within this construction of childhood, normative assumptions of gender prevail where girls, in particular, are cast as victims, their sexuality scrutinised and stigmatised when they are unable or do not live up to sexual innocence (Robinson, 2012). Gendered power relations are thus necessary elements in the study of children and sexuality education.

Following Connell (2011), this paper addresses gender as a relation of power involving the social construction of the relationship between men and women which can also begin to explain the teacher's recognition of the gendered patterns of male power in her classroom and beyond. As Connell (2011: 3) states, '[t]hese patterns are

generally known to social actors (they are energetically learnt by children)'. Gender, following Connell, is embedded within the wider social context, has material effects and is connected to race, class and sexuality. Of significance to this paper is Connell's approach that sees gender as related to the broader social processes which are actively shaped by social actors.

While Life Skills policy does not mention sexuality, this is not an indication of its absence, but instead its presence in the hidden curriculum (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). The theoretical approach in this paper conceptualises the teaching of Life Skills sexuality education in the Foundation Phase as heavily embedded within relations of power involving dominant conceptualisations of childhood sexual innocence, gender power relations and inequalities while shaping, and being shaped by, the broader social context. As Aggleton, De Wit, Myers and Du Mont (2014) note, research and theorisation into sexuality and health education require attention to the variation of relations and the social context within which these relations are forged. Thus, examining the perspective of one teacher about Life Skills sexuality education in Grade 2 requires attention to power, its manifestation in adult-child relations, gender relations in the classroom, which are also expressive of the wider context of the school.

Building on this approach, this article focuses on a single case, Mrs Z's conceptualisation of Life Skills against the backdrop of an impoverished African township context. This context reflects the battlefields of extreme social suffering associated with unemployment, fragile home settings, food insecurity and poverty. Farmer (1996: 274) refers to these conditions as 'structural violence' in a 'political economy of brutality,' affecting, as Seekings and Natrass (2005) elucidate, the 'African poor'. The large-scale social forces interact with, and have effects on, how children enact and construct their relations in the common space of the classroom.

Context and method

In this paper, one township teacher's perspective of teaching Life Skills sexuality education in the Foundation Phase is examined as an element of a broader ongoing multi-school case study into understanding and addressing gender inequalities and violence in and around schools. The broader study focuses on learners, teachers, community workers and parents in both primary and high schools to understand, identify and address the contextually specific manifestations of gender/sexual violence. In adopting a case study approach, the larger study is interested in the contextually specific manifestations of violence. Case studies are relevant here as this method enables an in-depth examination of schools. The research has, thus far, drawn on focus group discussions with teachers at the school (Bhana, 2015) and in-depth interviews with 11 Foundation Phase teachers. A focus on the teaching of Life Skills sexuality education is to understand the potential of teachers to address gender power inequalities and confront harmful cultural norms.

In this paper, the focus is on Mrs Z who participated in an in-depth interview after school, lasting approximately 90 minutes. The teacher is a head of department in the Foundation Phase at KwaDabeka Primary School (all names are pseudonyms). She is 51 years old, married with children, and has taught for 15 years in the Foundation Phase. She currently teaches Grade 2 – a class made up of 22 girls and 13 boys. When we began the interview, questions were asked about the learners' contexts. The teacher noted that, despite poverty and the availability of the child support grant (currently R330 per month), many of the learners could not even afford basic school necessities, for example, pencils. She noted that alcohol abuse, as well as the use of woonga (a cheap cocktail of dangerous drugs), has an impact on learners' every-day lives and their family experience. The teacher also reported that some learners told her that their mothers used the child support grant for doing their hair and nails. 'So instead of improving, it's not improving because of these grants,' said Mrs Z.

The conditions in KwaDabeka are fueled by legacies of apartheid, structural inequalities, poverty and food insecurity. Unemployment in the area was almost 35.4% in 2010 (Ethekwini Municipality, 2010) and many of the children live with grandmothers. In the context of high rates of HIV, some children in the Grade 2 class are, according to the teacher, infected with the disease, as are members of their family. The children's homes include government-sponsored reconstruction and development homes (RDP), a hostel called KK constructed for migrant workers during apartheid, and informal settlements made with sheets of tin, concrete and brick. Food insecurity is addressed, even if partially, by the provision of a daily feeding scheme at the school. Amid the broader climate of poverty, social and economic depression, the children's experiences are the effects of large-scale social forces which contribute to their suffering and the manifestation of gender violence in school.

The interview was loosely structured around the following issues: how Life Skills is conceptualised in relation to sexuality, teachings of sexuality and children's knowledge of it, gendered and contextual issues within and beyond the school in relation to boys' and girls' patterns of conduct, how specific cultural practices might support or hinder equitable gender relations, and responses to how these issues were addressed in Life Skills sexuality education. The interview was conducted by the author in English. The data were analysed drawing on key elements discussed around power, childhood sexuality and adult-child relations of power (Robinson, 2012; Renold, 2005) and connecting to Connell's (2011) theorisation of gender relations, gendered patterns of conduct in relation to broader gendered and cultural landscape. This conceptual framing supports the understanding of Life Skills sexuality education as embedded within and expressive of relations of power. Such power is not static, but is both disruptive of dominant understandings of children and sexuality and could also advance an understanding of the ways in which relations of power are patterned with respect to the classroom and wider gendered practices. This framework allows an understanding of Mrs Z's description of her actions in the classroom as they intersect with issues beyond the school.

The teacher's emphasis on sexual danger, on gender inequalities and violent masculinities and cultural norms which uphold male power are the direct effects of the interaction between the lived experiences of learners and the social forces which create the conditions of their suffering. Teaching Life Skills constitutes much more than simple engagement with gender, abuse and personal well-being. It is situated in, and informed by, learners' experiences in a context burdened by overwhelming affliction and suffering.

Sexual danger: You teach about touching, not sex

Sex education, as Alldred and David (2007) argue, is political and reinforces meanings and relations of power. First, the emphasis on sexual danger is often criticised by feminists who argue that risk and danger in sexuality education fails to consider positive and healthy relationships, rendering girls' power within a domain of weakness and vulnerability (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe & Thompson, 1998). However, there must be consideration of the social and sexual context to understand why the teacher advances sexual danger as a dominant narrative. Indeed, of the 64 514 sexual offences reported in 2012, 40.2% involved children between the ages of 0 and 11 (South African Police Service, 2013) and many of the victims of sexual violence, while spread out in the country, are reportedly located in contexts of fragile family structures, poverty and endemic violence. As Cameron-Lewis and Allen (2013: 125) note, while recognising the need for both pleasure and danger in sexuality education, '[t]o effectively support young people, sexuality education needs to be relevant to the diversity of their "lived realities," and for some young people, sexual violence is a very real threat'.

At KwaDabeka, the reality of sexual violence looms large when Mrs Z referred to monitoring the toilet habits of girls:

So you must observe if you are a teacher. Observe and then you call the parent and ask the parent if they have noticed that the child goes in and out to the toilet. Others will say no and others will say yes. And then you say okay, you go to the clinic, take the child to the clinic. Then most of them if you send them to the clinic you will get the report that the child was raped; she can't hold her urine ...

Mrs Z recognised the patterns of girls' toilet habits might be the effects of rape within a brutal environment where structural inequalities and male frailties in the economic front have often been argued as explanatory forces in understanding the high levels of sexual violence against girls under 10 (Jewkes, Sikweyiya, Morrell & Dunkle, 2011). The microscopic detail of the toilet habits of girls is shown above to be the effect of, and possible evidence for, sexual violence. Play was also regulated within this environment:

... you tell them don't play alone; don't play in a place that nobody sees you. Don't play until its late, night time, come early at home so that you be protected from anything that is bad outside.

The teacher's perspective is stamped by an indissociable recognition of the ways in which gender power inequalities within broader context creates sexual vulnerability for seven-year-old girls and points to the materiality of vulnerability:

... you tell them first that nobody must touch your body. Report if somebody touched you ... you report to your aunt, to your teacher, to your mother. Even if it's your father who is touching you, you report. Your neighbour, your brother, your cousin. In Foundation Phase you teach about touching not exactly sexual.

... report to your parent, your sister, or to me because I'm a teacher and I'm also your mother. If somebody always kiss you and kiss you and kiss you, report ...

...even to them [boys] you teach them any boy who is touching you, the uncle, the father, the grandpa, report! Nobody must touch you at the back and at the front.

The lack of reporting sexual violence, including sexual violence against boys, continues to reproduce the silence and scourge around child sexual abuse in the country (Jewkes, Dunkle, Nduna and Shai 2010). Life Skills sexuality education rooted in local context has much to offer in relation to social protection and reporting. 'Bad touch,' sexual danger and reporting are important knowledge and information strategies for young learners, as Mrs Z noted above. Understanding the acute lack of information and under-preparedness within families to address these matters, the teacher talked about 'bad touch' involving the 'breast' and 'stomach,' while referring to the vagina as 'cake' and the humour through which sexuality was mediated:

Yes, they know cake. They will laugh first ... because they are still young. Because even at home their mothers they don't say it's a vagina, they tell them that it's a gqe [local word for vagina].

The teacher went on to deny the use of the word 'sex':

You can't say you don't do sex, you can't say that word ... They are still young ... because their parents said no we must not use that word. They told us straight.

The inability of the teacher to say 'sex' because of her discomfort points to the discursive strategies through which teaching sexuality is negotiated in Grade 2, a point noted in other work (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Irvine, 2002; Bhana, 2007). Reproducing the problematic conceptualisation of early childhood and sexuality (Tobin, 1997), the word 'sex' is culturally and socially sanctioned for use by adults (both parents and the teacher), thereby regulating children's sexual knowledge and investing and reproducing sexuality as a domain of adult life. The teacher noted that in isiZulu the word 'sex' was too abstract for seven-year-olds: ukubhebhana. Yet the teacher disrupts the assumed idealisation of childhood innocence, stating:

They know it [sex]. They will come and say ... this one says this one ubhebhana nobani (who has sex with whom).

Later, in the interview the teacher repeats the contradiction in relation to HIV:

They know [sex]. We tell them, a boy doesn't sleep with a girl because if you sleep there will be a child and HIV ...

Life Skills sexuality education is more than just sex. It relates to power and the social forces which make it possible for the classroom to be an active space where the word 'sex' is both silenced and alive as it interacts with the everyday experiences of learners in the context of HIV. Sexual silence is not as powerful, as it is assumed to be with the teacher contradictorily upholding sexual innocence while locating the lived experience of children which brings discussion of sex alive in the Grade 2 classroom.

In talking about how she attempts to disrupt sexual innocence, Mrs Z noted how the classroom functions as an arena where children's sexuality is enacted and practised by referring to an incident where a seven-year-old girl showed boys her panty:

Showing the panty here in the classroom and kissing them ... I called her here and I told her this is wrong, you don't do this; you don't show boys your panty. Your body is your body. This is the temple of God, you don't show, you don't show. You must see it on your own, you don't show anybody. Then I wrote a letter to call the granny so that the granny will talk to her at home again.

In talking about how she tries to break down dominant discourses of childhood sexual innocence, the teacher suggested active agency of girls in the practice of sexuality where showing the panty and kissing have been found in other work to be key to the development of childhood sexual cultures in primary schools (Bhana, 2003). However, children's sexual agency has been brought under a disciplinary gaze, regulated by adult surveillance and religious strictures where the young body is seen as the 'temple of God' (Robinson, 2012). The teacher noted at this point that children's expression of sexuality was linked to experiences in overcrowded living settings, including the fact that more than one family shared spaces in the KK hostel. Her admonishment was based on social protection of girls, but it also operates to normalise 'good girlish behaviour' in opposition to the undisciplined and sexually contaminating life of working class girls (Renold, 2005). The distinction is established between girls who invoke the body as 'a temple of God' against the unhealthy display of sexuality of those who should be innocent. As Kehily (2012) notes childhood can invoke innocence, as well as corrupt children, with girls especially facing particular scorn for inappropriate over-sexualised behaviour. Children's sexuality is both evident and gendered where girls' active performance of sexuality is regulated and brought under the control of what is considered appropriate for feminine conduct (Robinson, 2012; Renold, 2005).

Acting against violence and teaching respect and gender equality

Mrs Z indicated that she is not blind to classroom dynamics and the take-up of violent masculinities in relation to male power and its exercise against girls and other boys. Unlike the literature in early childhood (MacNaughton, 2000) which refers to teaching discourses that make gender invisible, Mrs Z recognised and addressed the 'boy problem': She noted the gendered experiences on the playground where boys lifting girls dresses was common, as well as the sexual harassing practices in the Foundation Phase:

So the child [girl] will come crying telling me that that boy is picking my uniform up and others are laughing.

Mrs Z talked about recognising violent boys and distinguished between rural versus urban constructions of masculinity. In the interview, the teacher referred to a boy in her classroom who had come from rural KwaZulu-Natal who was particularly violent and the teacher explained this in relation to his upbringing on the 'farm'. Her response was *akuliwa la, akuliwa la* [we don't fight here] suggesting also the division created between the modern child in the township versus the 'other' un-developed rural boyhood. Significantly, Mrs Z indicated that the recognition of the classroom as a masculine domain was not unchallenged and that she used this experience to address respect and advance gender equality:

You tell them to respect them ... Not touching them; it's not allowed. God doesn't want that ... God doesn't want a bad thing, you must respect. Because this one tomorrow will be your mother, she's your sister, she is everything to you, you must respect. You teach them how important a mother is to them, you tell them this is your sister; this is your mother because if you are sick this one will help you in the classroom ... we tell them that everybody is equal and everybody is important. Nobody is higher than anyone, all of us are equal. I always teach them that.

The issues highlighted thus far show some evidence that Mrs Z sees Life Skills sexuality education as attempting to address and transform gender relations of inequalities. Such potential to transform unequal gender relations takes place within opportunistic moments in the school timetable. In challenging masculine power, Mrs Z draws on respect, religious discourses, empathy and the significance of women and girls to the lives of boys. She presents an alternate view in the classroom, especially in a context where boys and girls learn very early on about male power and the normative constructions of gender. However, the respect that she teaches boys is within an overall pattern where girls are subordinated. As will be illustrated, the work of addressing and challenging gender inequalities requires attention to gender and cultural ideologies which continue to frame male power in South Africa. When asked whether her tactics work, Mrs Z noted:

Boys will say ... my father told me that a man is big in the house ... And I say no you are equal, gone are those days ... they think the man is bigger than the woman ... They don't believe that we are equal because they are still young ... when my mother is giving my father food she uses a tray and a damp cloth but when she is giving somebody else my mother doesn't do that ... we don't eat before my father comes. We wait for my father ... They will tell you that ... They will tell you that my father's voice is the last one in the house. My mother will not say anything when my father says this ... a man is a head of the woman ... In our culture, you respect the man.

Addressing and transforming gender relations in Life Skills remain a formidable task. It requires attention to everyday routines and practices in the family and the school where gender and cultural norms permeate children's lives and where male entitlements are often the only pattern that young children witness. In the context of

gendered poverty, and even in instances where women work, the investment in and the complicity of women in supporting and endorsing the unequal relations of power are clear. Cultural norms and gendered processes bring schools and families in tension and in togetherness. The teacher's challenge to male power is in tension with the broader social experience, but it also is in sync with the gendered classroom dynamics where male power has been blamed for violence in and out of the classroom. While teaching against unequal relations of power attempts to transform gender relations, there are real challenges in relation to dominant gendered ideologies which put girls (and women) in their place.

At this point, Mrs Z noted, too, her own complicity within the broader social and cultural organisation of gender:

I cannot buy whatever I want. I must report to my husband ... I cannot report everything others I will hide ... You've got a coat, why are you buying this one too ... ubaba inhloko yekhaya [the father is the head of the house] you report everything. Although now it's modernised we don't report everything but our culture says you must report everything ... I don't challenge because once you challenge there will be noise in the house ... I buy this coat and hide it somewhere and I will show it one day and say my mother bought this coat ... everywhere you go ... I must report ... I must!

Mrs Z highlights her own gendered position within dominant cultural norms. She is required to report to her husband, even as a middle-class income earner in a context where 'the father is the head of the house' replicating children's experiences of gender relations and inequalities, as well as the constraint that girls experience both in the classroom and in the home. But power is not monolithically held by men, as Mrs Z suggested that, even within the tight constraints, she is able to 'hide' the coat, recognising that she limits 'noise in the house' by doing so. While Mrs Z is able to work against the grain, there is recognition of the imbrication of gender, power, culture and women's overall subordinate position, albeit with contestation.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to highlight, through Mrs Z's narrative, the ways in which Life Skills sexuality education in the Foundation Phase, an under-studied area of research, can be mobilised within the local context of a Grade 2 classroom. Life Skills in the Foundation Phase is deeply about power, gender, sexuality and the interaction with the broader social forces – although the explicit mention of sexuality is one which Life Skills policy fails to recognise (Department of Basic Education, 2011). The paper recognised that Life Skills sexuality education is embedded within relations of power, mediated and produced within the context of sexual innocence and normative gender relations and set in a broader social context. Gender weaves into the fabric of sexuality education. In particular, the paper has addressed and analysed Mrs Z's testimony on the basis of a framework that is laden with power and attentive to gender and broader social relations and inequalities. This paper has theorised Mrs Z's

perspective, practice and action as an attempt to transform the sexual and gendered landscape within which young children are placed. Mrs Z shows the capacity for engaging with these issues and scaffolding children's understanding of sexual danger, addressing their lived realities, while acknowledging boys' and girls' active construction of gender and sexuality. The attention to sexual danger is both critical and vital in the context where the school and the teacher might be the only source of hope when divulging sexual violence. Teaching about how to care for oneself in the context of sexual danger is important, as is the attention to creating a climate of respect and advancing gender equality (Johnson, Sendall & McCuaig, 2014). Simultaneously, Mrs Z also reinstates the discourse of danger, silence and shame by her inability to utter the word 'sex,' which reproduces discourses of childhood sexual innocence.

There are complexities as Mrs Z attempts to mobilise around gender equality. The mobilisation of gender equality in the classroom takes place in a context where cultural and social norms loom large, albeit not in reductionist and deterministic ways. Nevertheless, they do remain significant in understanding the persistent claim made in South Africa about hegemonic male power (Jewkes & Morrell, 2012). There are important changes required in relation to structural inequalities and ending children's (and girls') particular vulnerability to sexual violence within school contexts.

Working with teachers to expand feminist ideas of gender equality and addressing sexuality is possible, but it requires further attention to, and support for, Foundation Phase teachers to address such silences in their schools, to stop the violence, to change masculinities embedded in entitlement and violence, while supporting teachers to reflect and interrogate their culpability and complicity within broader gender and cultural norms. In this paper Mrs Z addressed these complex issues, suggesting potential within the Foundation Phase to critically reflect and interrogate gender relations of power. She does so not because she has support of the school and the Department of Basic Education, nor have there been any attempts to address these issues. Mrs Z's attention to gender and sexuality in her classroom is fueled by children's local realities demanding her attention to it in the everyday experience of classroom life. At the level of policy an explicit focus on sexuality education that addresses gender transformation is required. To date there has been no debate about the absence of sexuality in Life Skills policy in the Foundation Phase. Sexuality education cannot in itself challenge the broader social system. However, the Foundation Phase is an important context where such work can begin to support gender equality in early childhood.

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