

# Addressing LGBT+ issues in Comprehensive Sexuality Education for Learners with Visual Impairment: Guidance from Disability Professionals

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## Abstract

Despite public outcry, South Africa decided to rollout comprehensive sexuality education in schools. However, there are no scripted lesson plans for teachers of learners with visual impairment. Local literature suggests that the current sexuality education curriculum fails to engage with sexuality diversity, but is imbued with themes of compulsory heterosexuality and able-bodiedness, perpetuating homophobia, transphobia and ableism in schools and broader communities. The paper sought guidance from disability professionals in how to best address lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other sexualities' (LGBT+) issues in comprehensive sexuality education for learners with visual impairment. Bourdieu's work on doxa, orthodoxy and heterodoxy underpinned this study. Three professionals working with learners with visual impairment were interviewed in a focus group, and one principal in a school for learners with visual impairment was individually interviewed. Data were thematically analysed. Pre- and in-service teachers are encouraged not to see comprehensive sexuality education offered to learners with visual impairment as different from their sighted peers. Professionals urged teachers to accept LGBT+ learners with visual impairment in their dress, expression and embodiment. However, teachers need to be aware of learners' cultural and religious differences. Current lesson plans need to be revisited to safeguard against compulsory heterosexuality and able-bodiedness.

**Keywords:** Bourdieu; comprehensive sexuality education; compulsory able-bodiedness; compulsory heterosexuality; learners with visual impairment; LGBT+

## Introduction

South Africa is currently testing within selected provinces its rollout of comprehensive sexuality education comprehensive sexuality education scripted lesson plans for learners as early as grade 4 (ages 9 to 11) (Department of Basic Education 2019). The scripted lesson plans include topics such as pornography, masturbation, HIV and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other sexualities' (LGBT+)<sup>1</sup> related issues (Department of Basic Education

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<sup>1</sup> LGBT+, in other writings LGBTIQ(2S)+, refers to a broad category for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer (or questioning), asexual (or ally) and others. I concur with Hunt and Holmes (2015, 170) that 'Although commonly used, we recognise that [LGBTIQ(2S)+] can have a homogenising effect blurring differences between identity and sexual orientation, and erasing the specificities of power, marginalisation, and/or privilege based on gender, race, class, ability, and other forms of social location and identity.'

2019). comprehensive sexuality education refers to a wide-ranging, lifelong approach to engendering attitudes, beliefs and skills regarding sex and sexuality within relationships and personal decision-making (UNESCO 2018). According to the South African Department of Basic Education (2019), comprehensive sexuality education lessons are targeted to learners as early as grade 4 given increasingly early sexual debut, teenage pregnancy, high rates of HIV infection and exposure to pornography amongst learners. However, currently there exists a lack of guidelines for teachers working with learners with visual impairment<sup>2</sup>.

More importantly, there is no guidance from the Department of Basic Education to pre- and in-service teachers of how to address LGBT+ issues such as dating, disclosure of sexual identity, stigma and support for LGBT+ learners with visual impairment. Public policy such as the Constitution of South Africa Act of 1996, the Children's Act 38 of 2005<sup>3</sup>, the Education White Paper 6 and National Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools entrusts schools to provide access to age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health information in an accessible format to learners. However, in practice a focus on LGBT+ and learners with visual impairment is frequently absent from sexuality education as in the Life Orientation (LO) curriculum due to the influence of compulsory heterosexuality (Francis 2017a, 2017b, 2019a, 2019b; Wilmot and Naidoo 2014, 2018; Shefer and Macleod 2015) as well as compulsory able-bodiedness (Kafer 2003; McRuer 2006; Campbell 2009). For LGBT+ learners with visual impairment, compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory abled-bodiedness cannot be separated. Instead, they intersect with each other to produce sites of homophobia, transphobia and ableism in schools as well as in communities more broadly.

Compulsory heterosexuality refers to the over-use or preference for heterosexual norms such as the all-pervasive use of language and images of male and female heterosexuality in most sexuality education (Francis 2017a, 2017b, 2019a, 2019b; Wilmot and Naidoo 2014, 2018; Shefer and Macleod 2015), which perpetuates the exclusion (Wilmot and Naidoo 2014), lack of support for (Brown and Buthelezi 2020) and unwelcoming attitudes that are directed towards those sexualities differing from heterosexuality (Wilson and Reygan 2015). In a similar vein, hegemonic representations of able-bodiedness such as the non-existence of disabled bodies within comprehensive sexuality education material (Chappell 2015), reinforce negative stereotypes and myths about the sexuality of people living with visual impairment (PVI). This includes socio-medical discourses suggesting that PVI are celibate, asexual or genderless (Chappell 2019), and therefore that they do not need comprehensive sexuality education (De Reus et al. 2015; Hanass-Hancock 2009a; Rohleder et al. 2012).

A review by Francis (2017a) of 27 publications concerning homophobia and sexuality diversity in South African schools showed that there is immense opportunity within comprehensive sexuality education for social justice education, anti-oppressive education and the queering of normalised sexualities and ways of being in sexuality education curricula and pedagogy in schools. Other local recent scholarship including that of Bhana, Crewe and Aggleton (2019), Francis (2017a) and Shefer and Macleod (2015) remind us that

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<sup>2</sup> Learners with visual impairment is an inclusive term that includes a variety of forms of vision loss including low vision, colour-blindness, partial blindness, and complete blindness (Kapperman and Kelly 2013).

<sup>3</sup> The right to sexuality education is underpinned in the SA Constitution under the right to innocence, bodily and psychological integrity, education, access to reproductive information and healthcare services in Section 12(2)(a-c) and 27(1), 28, 29, 32 of Chapter 2 of the Bill of Rights (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996). In Chapter 2, Section 38 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005, access to sexuality education for learners with visual impairment is acknowledged under the section dealing with children's right to information around sexuality and reproduction.

comprehensive sexuality education is intended to be a broad curriculum encompassing diverse constructions of gender, sexuality and anti-oppressive action within the education system. Scholars contend that for comprehensive sexuality education to be effective, not only must intersections such as those between disability and sexuality need to be connected (Chappell 2015; Hanass-Hancock 2009a; De Reus et al. 2015), but also comprehensive sexuality education should be delivered within a human rights and sexual justice framework (Francis 2017b; Bhana et al. 2019; Shefer and Macleod 2015). The emphasis given to human rights is part of an inclusive attempt to accommodate all learners including LGBT+ learners living with disabilities (Chappell 2019; Rohleder et al. 2012; Sait et al. 2011).

This paper derives from a larger project to develop the first Advanced Diploma in Visual Impairment Studies (VIS) programme in South Africa. In connection with this, the author has prepared a book chapter titled 'Comprehensive Sexuality Education for Learners with Visual Impairment' as part of an open education resource to support students registered for the VIS programme. The need for this paper arose from discussions with teachers of learners with visual impairment in both special and full-service schools from 2016-2018. Teachers requested more knowledge of how to address the gender and sexuality education of learners with visual impairment. The paper presents qualitative findings from disability professionals working with pre- and in-service teachers of learners with visual impairment as to how they can address LGBT+ issues in comprehensive sexuality education with LGBT+ learners with visual impairment in mind.

### ***Comprehensive sexuality education in South Africa***

Since the Department of Basic Education's (2019) announcement of a rollout of comprehensive sexuality education scripted lesson plans in Life Skills and Life Orientation (LO) school subjects, South African scholars have raised questions concerning the themes present within this curriculum area (Francis and DePalma 2014a; Shefer and Macleod 2015; Ngabaza and Shefer 2019), the role and challenges for teachers offering comprehensive sexuality education (Francis 2011, 2012, 2017b; Helleve et al. 2011; Smith and Harrison 2013) and teachers' preparedness for delivering comprehensive sexuality education lessons (Francis and DePalma 2015; Helleve et al. 2011; Helleve et al. 2009). For example, Wilmot and Naidoo (2018) found compulsory heterosexuality to be deeply entrenched in the language of LO textbooks, Francis (2011, 2012, 2017b) found teacher's values to conflict with aspects of sexual diversity, and Francis and DePalma (2015) concluded that the teachers in their study lacked confidence to teach certain topics within the sexuality education curriculum.

When comprehensive sexuality education is taught, the content is still largely heterosexual (Francis and DePalma 2015), disease-ridden (Shefer and Macleod 2015) and abstinence-focused (Ngabaza and Shefer 2019). According to Francis and DePalma (2015), Helleve et al. (2011) and Helleve et al. (2009), teachers lack the confidence to teach about sex, sexual and gender diversity such as same-sex sexualities and transgender and intersex persons. In parallel, however, and over the last few decades, disability, HIV and sexuality education have become growing fields of research, often dispelling myths that people living with disabilities are disinterested in sex (Rohleder et al. 2009), cannot be infected with HIV (Groce, Yousafzai, and van der Maas 2007), or do not need comprehensive sexuality education (Hanass-Hancock 2009a). However, to date, there are few curriculum materials, including the current issued scripted lesson plans, to engage with the diverse experiences of

young people who identify with diverse genders and sexualities living with disabilities (Chappell 2015, 2016, 2019).

A few South African scholars have commenced discussion of the diverse intersections of disability and sexuality (Chappell 2015; Hanass-Hancock 2009a; Sait et al. 2011), knowledge of and teaching learners with disabilities HIV and sexuality education (Groce, Yousafzai, and van der Maas 2007; Hanass-Hancock 2009a; Rohleder et al. 2009), and the challenges of providing HIV and comprehensive sexuality education to learners with disabilities (Rohleder et al. 2012; Hanass-Hancock 2009b; De Reus et al. 2015). A meta-review synthesis by Duke (2011) suggests that many LGBT+ adolescents living with disabilities in developing countries are not only neglected in sexuality education but subjected to homophobia, transphobia and ableism in both mainstream and special schools. In both local and international contexts, there is a need to trouble the existing over-emphasis of heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness not only within sexuality education, but also in the broader social contexts encountered by learners with diverse sexualities living with(out) disabilities (Chappell 2015; Duke 2011; Campbell 2009).

### ***Compulsory heterosexuality and able-bodiedness***

Francis (2017a) reviewed 27 publications detailing how South African LGBT youth experienced schooling and how schools responded to gender and sexuality diversity. In the review, Butler, Alpaslan, Allen and Astbury (2003) report on how 18 South African gay and lesbian youth experienced rejection, isolation and harassment at the hands of peers, teachers and school administrators. Wells and Polders' study (2006) found widespread victimisation and homophobia experienced by LGBT learners inflicted by school managers and teachers through the policing of dress codes to reinforce rigid gender binaries. In terms of school managers' response to the violation of the rights of LGBT learners, Bhana (2014) conducted a study with school managers to find out their responses to the violation of LGBT+ youth. In the study (Bhana 2014, 7), the response of one of the school managers shows a response of silencing, denial and blame:

That's why I say as long as it's not a major issue, it is their situation, they sort it out ... I'm not saying they are not human beings, I'm just saying, don't put it in my face and expect me to do something about it, it's not what I believe in.

Francis's (2017a) review of literature on homophobia and sexuality diversity in South African schools suggests new directions within comprehensive sexuality education in social justice education, anti-oppressive education and the queering of gender binaries in school settings. A recent victory includes the admission of a transgender girl to the single-sex Wynberg Girls' High School in Cape Town and raises questions about how schools engage positively with gender and sexuality diversity as noted in a *TimesLIVE* article on May 5, 2019. Also noteworthy is the landmark ruling by the Seshego Magistrate's Court requiring the Limpopo Department of Education to pay R60,000 personal compensation to Nare Mphela, a transgender woman from Limpopo who experienced discrimination from her school principal based on her gender identity as noted in a *Daily Maverick* article on March 24, 2017. Mphela's principal had instructed fellow students to harass Mphela in the school toilets as well as grasp Mphela's crotch to "find out what is there".

With respect to able-bodiedness Chappell (2013, 2015, 2016) identifies how gender and sexual minority adolescents living with disabilities report high levels of loneliness, depression and suicidal thoughts due to ignorance or outright hostility of families towards those who identify as LGBT+. The situation is exacerbated in the African context where disability and sexuality are almost never simultaneously discussed (Chappell 2015). In resource-rich settings such as the USA, Canada and the UK, a meta-synthesis conducted by Duke (2011, 25) revealed that despite teachers attempt to create an inclusive environment for all learners in schools, 'LGBT youth and special education students are both members of socially stigmatised groups'.

According to Harley et al. (cited in Duke 2011, 1), such learners represent 'members of multiple cultural minorities'. By being a sexual minority, 'LGBT students who receive special education services [...] possess multiple stigmatised identities and simultaneously occupy multiple socially devalued positions' (Duke 2011, 25). Because of this and other multiple, overlapping forms of oppression (for example, racism, sexism, homophobia, classism and ableism), LGBT+ learners with disabilities have 'multiple [and complex] service needs involving disabilities ... [and their] identities ... [and their] identities' (Harley et al. cited in Duke 2011, 1).

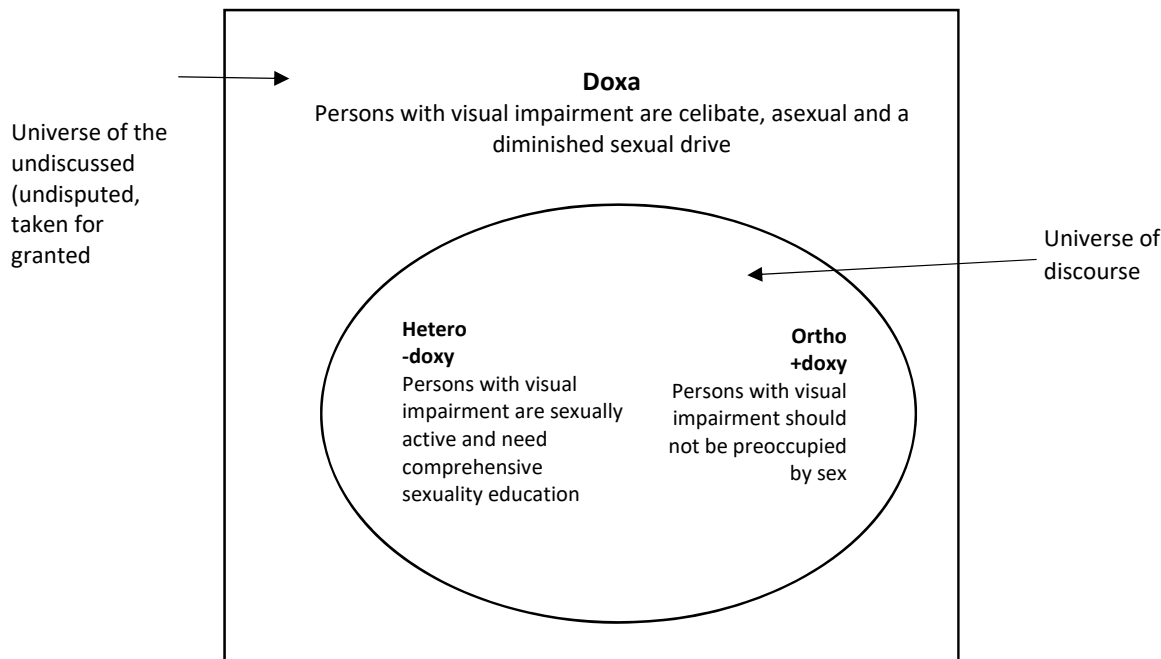
### **Theoretical framework: Bourdieu's doxa, orthodoxy and heterodoxy**

To understand the construction of the normative ideology surrounding debate about comprehensive sexuality education for learners with visual impairment, I utilised the theoretical framework offered by Pierre Bourdieu and its focus on doxa, orthodoxy and heterodoxy. According to Bourdieu<sup>4</sup> (1977, 1984, 1990), doxa refers to universal assumptions, language and discourses which are taken-for-granted and undisputed by the majority in society (see Figure 1). In this case, it is widely assumed that young people and adults with visual impairments are heterosexual and "expected to be impotent and uninterested in sex" (Foulke and Uhde 1974, 199).

Building on this doxa, not only does the literature point to few studies in the South African context on the intersection between LGBT+ and young people living with disabilities, but there are also only a few autobiographical accounts written by persons with visual impairments about their own sexual experiences or identities (White 2003, for an exception see Clare 2015). Closely related to the doxa, orthodoxy refers to the statements, positions and laws defended by groups and individuals concerning the doxa (Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1990). For instance, prominent social institutions such as government or influential religious groups may hold that persons with disabilities are not (or should not) be interested in any sexual activity, or cannot identify with LGBT+ sexualities, and therefore do not need sexuality education. Chappell (2015) identifies such positions as main contributors to compulsory heterosexuality and the preference for able-bodiedness in most sexuality education.

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<sup>4</sup> Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1990) provides a complex theory of practice that has been summarised here. For keen readers, Navarro (2006) provides a more elaborative introduction into Bourdieu's theoretical terminology and wider application.



**Figure 1: Relationship between doxa, orthodoxy and heterodoxy in offering comprehensive sexuality education to learners with visual impairment (adapted from Bourdieu 1977, 168)**

On the other hand, heterodoxy refers to the competing stance usually taken by disadvantaged or marginalised groups (Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1990). Here, research showing PVI are in fact sexually active (Rohleder et al. 2009), and the emerging voices of LGBT+ young people living with disabilities (Chappell 2019) provide accounts that compete with the dominant doxa. These findings further suggest the need for disabled bodies to be represented within comprehensive sexuality education (Chappell 2015). In addition, the Constitution of South Africa Act of 1996 provides a heterodoxy through its prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, disability, freedom of expression, while the Children's Act 38 of 2005 promotes access to sexual and reproductive health information in an accessible format.

## Materials and methods

### *Project description*

In 2015, the European Union (EU), in collaboration with the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), identified the need for the implementation of a more inclusive education policy in South Africa. A call for proposals from universities in South Africa was launched in three focus areas: visual, deaf and hard-of-hearing, and neurological development impairments. A grant of R 9.952 million was awarded to the University of Pretoria (UP) for the period of 2016 to 2021 to advance the implementation of inclusive education in schools for learners with visual impairment. Work involved the following deliverables: (1) large-scale research with full-service, special needs schools, teachers, stake-

holders and experts; (2) the development of an advanced postgraduate programme in Visual Impairment Studies (the first in South Africa); (3) the development of open education resource materials to support registered students in the programme; and (4) the establishment of a Centre for Visual Impairment Studies (CVIS).

Ethical clearance for the work was provided by the University of Pretoria's Research Ethics Committee (UP 17/06/01 Ferreira 17-003). This stipulated procedures of informed consent, voluntary participation with no negative consequences of declining, and confidentiality of participants' identifying information. This paper presents qualitative data collected from a focus group discussion and individual interview with four the invited professionals contributing to module development and open education resource materials from the Visual Impairment Studies programme. Participants did not receive financial incentive for their participation in the study.

**Table 1: Participant characteristics**

| Pseudonym | Focus group interview (FGI) or individual interview (II) | Race and sex | Occupation   | Type of organisation        | Years of working with learners with visual impairment |
|-----------|--|--------------|--|-----------------------------|---|
| K         | FGI  | Black female | Head of disability unit and registered educational psychologist. | Higher academic institution | 10 years  |
| C         | FGI  | White female | Teacher at a school for learners with visual impairment          | Secondary high school       | 5 years   |
| R         | FGI  | White female | Low vision and blind support specialist                          | Private company             | 54 years  |
| X         | II   | White female | Principal at a school for learners with visual impairment        | Secondary high school       | 10 years  |

### **Sample**

Participants were invited on a writing retreat as part of a module development and writing workshop. Participants were selected via purposive sampling based on their expertise and experience in working with learners with visual impairment. Three (all female) professionals working with learners with visual impairment were interviewed as part of a focus group. They included the director of a university disability unit, a low vision and blind support specialist, and a schoolteacher working at a school for learners with visual impairment. In addition, the female principal of a school for learners with visual impairment was interviewed individually

(Table 1). Participants were asked for a preferred pseudonym. Letters of alphabets were preferred as opposed to names. Unfortunately, no male participants were available with expertise in visual impairment, gender and sexuality studies to contribute to the conversation. In analysing the data co-generated by the researcher and participants, three themes were developed as discussed below.

### ***Data collection***

The study adopted a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. The focus group discussion lasted for over 1 hour. The author (a doctoral candidate and materials developer) facilitated the group and conducted the individual interview in English as this was preferred by all participants. Interview questions were developed from the findings of a larger ongoing study in schools for learners with visual impairment looking at the needs and challenges encountered, the wider literature around offering comprehensive sexuality education for learners with visual impairment, and answers from participants in addressing LGBT+ issues with learners with visual impairment in mind.

### ***Data management and analysis***

The focus group and individual interview were audio-recorded and later transcribed. Participants were sent the written transcripts for membership checking. Participants were also sent a final document of codes and derived themes to check if the reported findings were valid. Data were analysed using the six steps of thematic analysis identified by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarisation with the data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) search for themes, (4) review of themes, (5) finding and naming of themes with consultation of the literature and theoretical framework, and finally (6) producing the report.

## **Findings**

Three main themes were developed from the study

### ***Comprehensive sexuality education for learners with visual impairment should not be viewed as different to that provided to sighted learners***

One of the emergent themes from the analysis concerned the importance of teachers not discriminating against learners with visual impairment by seeing them as different than their sighted peers in terms of psychosexual interests, needs and development. As the individually interviewed respondent put it:

First of all, they are more like other children and they are different from every other child. They are very much like other children. It's just that the vision loss makes it harder for them to copy other people's behaviour ... One shouldn't make a very conspicuous effort to address these issues. You do it the same way you do it with other children (X)

An educator should utilise the same guidelines and values such as privacy, confidentiality and sensitivity as with able-bodied learners:



And the other thing very important issue is privacy, confidentiality of what's happened and also confidentiality about sexual orientation because some people are more private than others and children are sometimes cruel as you know. And so when you discuss these issues in a lesson ... you address it in a neutral, calm tone like you will discuss any other issue that comes out in a text or the curriculum (X).

That said, respondents acknowledged that learners with visual impairment could be 'more vulnerable' in terms of severity of vision loss '...because they have to come so close to you to experience you' hence the vulnerability in that, 'They cannot easily identify a predator ... a person who comes with a wrong attitude, with something in mind' (X). By not including learners with visual impairment within comprehensive sexuality education curriculum, '[the vulnerability] could be just more intensified when you have a disability' (K). But, at the same time, it should be 'highlight[ed] that LGBTI issues are no different if you have a disability, because then you again discriminating to say it's not the same' (K). In the focus group discussion, respondents further confirmed that learners with visual impairment should be taught the same comprehensive sexuality education content as that prescribed by the Department of Basic Education for their sighted peers.

And it starts about primary school [in life skills lessons] (C)

Meeting strangers, what way you can touch me and where you can't touch me ... (R)

So, it starts in that almost, a bit of a negative way but in any case. So, its jah, and then high school. Almost each year, there's some topic related to it [comprehensive sexuality education] (C)

### ***Acceptance of LGBT+ learners with visual impairment in dress, expression and embodiment***

Another emergent theme concerned the acceptance by teachers of how LGBT+ learners with visual impairment choose to express themselves. For instance, one participant in the focus group discussion described a scenario where she facilitated the idea of two gay learners with visual impairment she taught going to a matriculation dance together:

I think I started by asking them about matric dates ... because I was picking so I said ... "Are you gonna ask a girl or a boy to matric dance?" Then there was a little bit like silence... And then like, "Mam" and then they said, "Do you think I can actually?" And then I said, "You will be the first but why not, what can the school do?" (C)

And what was the reaction of the [other teaching staff]? (R)

The staff now have to appear to be liberal and actually because they know both of the guys, it made a difference, they know them personally, they respect them [now] (C)

[Conversation continued...]

...when the one guy at the matric dance said, “Well, you look fantastic together”, then he said, “Mam, I decided to do this because I had that conversation with you - you gave me that idea” (C)

In the in-depth interview, it was reported that on one occasion, a transgender learners with visual impairment had been allowed to wear a dress to the school dance:

There has been many incidents where a boy wants to go with a boy to a matric dance, and one boy who actually wanted to wear a dress to the dance. You can't now say, “No, you [are] not allowed to do that”. By the Constitution and human rights, they have a right to do that (X)

However, the acceptance of LGBT+ learners with visual impairment and their representation in schools was not welcomed by all members of teaching staff. One of the focus group respondents reported negative sentiments from a school principal who had been advised to add a gender-neutral bathroom to their school by the local government:

But - the attitude! Now the other day... so our deputy goes for training... (C)

Male or female? (R)

Male. *Wit boere*<sup>5</sup> male. So he comes back from the training and he says we supposed to now change. We need another restroom for kids who now identify [as gender-neutral], and now we need another one. He said, “I was at a workshop”. He says, “This government and it's crazy ideas. I don't know where we going with this country.” That's the introduction! He says, “It's crazy! No more values, now we can't even pray and says we must just keep quiet about our convictions ...” That was the report back (C)

### ***Awareness of cultural and religious differences amongst learners***

In conceptualising a comprehensive sexuality education programme, the respondent (X) participating in the individual interview maintained that teachers need to acknowledge that, ‘...age is very important’, as well as ‘is it a mixed group of boys and girls, or is it just a single sex group that you have in front of you?’. Every learner and teacher presents with their own unique background to sexual topics. Some learners ‘...want to become very explicit about things and you actually have to demonstrate to them in class how to use a condom.’ On the other hand, some teachers ‘might not be willing to discuss openly what some learners would want to come up’

To teacher comprehensive sexuality education effectively, there needs to be an awareness that ‘...in some cultures, it's taboo to talk about sex’ (R). Learners with visual impairment come from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds creating within group differences.

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<sup>5</sup> An Afrikaner white man

Well, I mean there's a huge difference between the main religious groups. Like with Muslims, and Christians, and you have radical Christians and you have radical Muslims. ... So, you need to accommodate all of that and be sensitive to all ... one needs to respect all of their differences.

X advised teachers to be aware of these cultural and religious differences among learners, while being mindful of their own biases and discomfort.

*Facilitator:* But, I was wondering ... the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements [regarding comprehensive sexuality education] which ... should be taught ... Does it actually depend on the teacher or ...?

Yes, that will also depend on the teacher very much because some teachers have up to now been allowed to choose their own material for lessons. Not all women will be comfortable to speak about explicit sexuality with a mixed group in front of her. So, there are also those things that the teacher might have difficulty with (X)

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to seek guidance from disability professionals of how teachers can best offer comprehensive sexuality education which engages with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other sexualities when working with learners with visual impairment. Participants in this study adopted an anti-discriminatory stance suggesting that, in principle, and despite being more vulnerable, the education offered to LGBT+ learners with visual impairment should not be different to that offered to their sighted peers. Such a stance is consistent with the work of Helleve et al. (2011), Brown and Buthelezi (2020) and Wilson and Reygan (2015), who argue that teachers should adopt principles of privacy and respect for difference when engaging with LGBT+ learners. The finding also echoes the work of DePalma and Francis (2015, Smith and Harrison (2013) and Bhana et al. (2019) who argue that pre- and in-service teachers should be able to deliver comprehensive sexuality education lessons in a confident and non-judgemental manner.

Respondents in this study sought to encourage the acceptance of LGBT+ learners with visual impairment in terms of their dress, expression and embodiment in schools. As highlighted earlier, the existing literature suggests that much sexuality education in South Africa is disease-ridden, embodies compulsory heterosexuality, and does not have disabled bodies in mind (Mayeza and Vincent 2019; Shefer and Macleod 2015; Chappell 2015). The study's finding supports calls by Bhana et al. (2019), Potgieter and Reygan (2012) and Ngabaza and Shefer (2019) to de-construct the complex and inter-linked systems of oppression present in most sexuality education curricula to promote the adoption of a human rights-based approach, thereby encouraging attitudes of tolerance, acknowledgement of disabled bodies, as well as the acceptance of minority sexualities (Chappell 2019; Wilmot and Naidoo 2014; Wilson and Reygan 2015). In order to achieve this goal, teachers require practical and theoretical knowledge of human rights, sexual justice and queer framings to contend with diverse cultural and religious ideologies and to advocate against gender inequality, the supremacy of heteronormativity and compulsory able-bodiedness in the South African context (Francis 2017a; Wilmot and Naidoo 2018; Chappell 2019).

The theoretical framework of this study suggests that the doxa concerning LGBT+ learners with visual impairment sexuality in South Africa still reflects the morality that children living with disabilities are innocent and pure, and should be kept ignorant for as long as possible for fear they may become 'sexualised' (Chappell 2015; Hanass-Hancock 2009a; De Reus et al. 2015). Such a perspective has been heavily promoted both by 'priests' (Schäfer 2014, 384) and 'prophets' (Schäfer 2014, 384) within the South African context. Within this context, there is a need for what might be described as an allodoxic position on the part of what Schäfer (2014, 384) has referred to as 'sorcerers': or individuals with the potential to exert a doxa-like influence and practices in a subordinate way, without an explicit interest in contributing to an on-going narrative. Sorcerers' position rarely align with the interests or positions of priests or prophets but compete with them for 'for intellectual legitimacy, recognition and relevance' (Schäfer 2014, 194). To some extent, LGBT+ learners with visual impairment may be seen as 'sorcerers' themselves for (a) they have authority to inform us about their own experiences; (b) their position may (or not) align with the priests' or prophets' position(s); and (c) their autobiographical accounts may be an effort to compete 'for intellectual legitimacy, recognition and relevance'.

### ***Limitations***

Like all studies, this one has its limitation. Importantly, none of the participants identified as experts in comprehensive sexuality education or LGBT+ issues but as disability professionals. Views were elicited from a very small sample of informants. Participants were all female, which limited the range of experience tapped and the guidance provided.

### **Conclusion**

Despite differing viewpoints for and against its provision to school-going learners, South Africa will shortly roll out comprehensive sexuality education to learners as early as grade 4 (Department of Basic Education 2019). Despite this, it remains unclear whether the Department of Basic Education will offer specialised guidance and appropriate lesson plans for learners with visual impairment.

The available literature suggests a clear overfocus on heterosexuality and able-bodiedness in most forms of sexuality education in South Africa (Francis 2017a; Ngabaza and Shefer 2019; Chappell 2019). This excludes reference to, and engagement with the interests and needs of, gender and sexual minority young people living with disabilities including learners with visual impairment. Moving forwards, findings from this study suggest there is little need to differentiate the comprehensive sexuality education offered to LGBT+ learners with visual impairment to their sighted counterparts. Instead, the study encourages teachers to take steps to accept LGBT+ learners with visual impairment as part of mainstream provision in their dress, expression and embodiment (see recommendations by Reygan 2016; Brown and Buthelezi 2020; Wilson and Reygan 2015). In special educational settings, teachers will also need to be mindful that LGBT+ learners with visual impairment have multiple, overlapping forms of oppressions (for example, racism, sexism, homophobia, classism and ableism) and this requires multiple service needs (Harley et al. 2002).

To facilitate this, teachers should display values and characteristics such as sensitivity and non-judgementalism as well as a concern for human-rights in their approach to teaching

about sex and relationships (Bhana et al. 2019; Shefer and Macleod 2015; Mayeza and Vincent 2019). LGBT+ learners with visual impairment and their teachers come from a large diverse of populations with various cultural and religious differences which teachers should keep in mind when designing comprehensive sexuality education programmes (Francis 2011, 2012, Helleve et al. 2011; Smith and Harrison 2013).

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## Declaration of interest statement

The author of this paper declares no potential conflict of interest. The views expressed here are those of the author alone and should not be taken to imply the views of the funders.

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