

# Education for Sexualities in the Voices of Its Protagonists: An Experience in Context

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**Abstract:** Introduction: this work narrates the experience of the implementation of CSE (Comprehensive Sexual Education) in Argentina, at the Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences of the Autonomous University of Entre Ríos, within the “School Program of Comprehensive Sexual Education” (SPCSE) developed at compulsory schooling in the voices of teachers and the school management team. Aims: The aims of this paper are to share some of the issues that characterize the SPCSE modality, some progress and obstacles of its implementation, as well as to value the experiences of those who carry out the CSE, in order to know what happens when it comes to the classroom. Methods: it was qualitative, through the use of questionnaires to 13 elementary teachers and in-depth interviews with 5 key informants for the role they played in the management. They were analyzed and relevant data were selected, central ideas were elaborated and relationships and reflections derived from this process. Results: As obstacles or initial resistances, training, relationship with families, school practices, among others, predominated. As potentialities, those who embraced the CSE see it as enriching on a personal and professional level, not only in relation to the contents and the predisposition for learning, but also in the construction of more affective relationships. Conclusions: We recognize the great transformation potential of the CSE. Its implementation requires a systemic and sustainable change. In this sense, those of us who are part of this program are highly committed to developing strategies to face the difficulties and weaknesses in order to meet the needs of each school community. In order that the respect for human rights is visible and real, they are principles and convictions that are supported by the policies of the faculty.

**Key words:** Education sexual integral, comprehensive sexual education, teacher training, sex educators.

## 1. Introduction

This work is a preliminary exploratory study, which takes as a universe sample a group of teachers and directors of the SPCSE (School Program of Comprehensive Sexual Education), from the city of Paraná, Entre Ríos, Argentina. Through it CSE (comprehensive sexual education) is implemented in all levels of schools of the Faculty of Humanities Arts and Social Sciences of the Autonomous University of Entre Ríos. This study focuses on teachers and

principals at primary level. The aim is to inquire about the thoughts, beliefs, emotions, trajectories made and know about what happens, from the perceptions of the teacher, when the prescriptive curriculum of CSE reaches the classrooms.

Although Argentina has the National Comprehensive Sexual Education Program, instituted by Law No. 26.150 that establishes that “all students have the right to receive Comprehensive Sexual Education in public educational establishments, of state and private management ...”, there have been advances and setbacks in its implementation and there are significant differences in terms of the different geographical regions for its implementation. In turn, as some studies show this is consistent with predominant representations of teachers about sexuality in some geographical regions of the country [1]. In this framework, the program to which we refer

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This paper is supported by School Program of Comprehensive Sexual Education (SPCSE).

Comprehensive Sexual Education in Argentina is named Educación Sexual Integral (ESI).

is an unprecedented proposal, based on an institutional educational policy that allows its concretion with a committed position from a gender perspective, critical, against hegemonic and with the focus on sexual rights, enabling the word, affectivity and emotions in the classroom, among other issues.

We will describe, in particular, some issues that make the program modality and some progress achieved. Later we will focus on the experience of those who carry out the implementation of the CSE through categories such as self-perception as sexual educators; the obstacles and resistance, as well as the potentialities, strengths and feelings in front of new forms of teaching and learning.

To educate for sexualities it is necessary to review the system of thoughts about it, highlight the emotions, review the belief system that sustains it, recognize one's own sexosophy, to educate from the sexological knowledge and not from it. It should be noted that sexosophy, a term coined by John Money, refers to "a set of principles and knowledge that people have about their own intimate experience of their sexual function", the same "... encompasses a series of personal and shared values and it encompasses a series of values transmitted through culture ..." [2], is a carrier of prejudices, is not impartial and makes judgments [2], hence there is need to reflect on it.

### *1.1 Which Legal Advances Support the CSE?*

In Argentina, from the enactment of Law No. 26.150, promulgated on October 23, 2006, it established that "all students have the right to receive comprehensive sexual education in public and private educational establishments, of national jurisdictions, provincial, municipal and of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires". This Law includes the constitutional principles of equality and non-discrimination, having a body of laws and treaties that precede it. Currently there is a valuable legal framework that frames and prescribes the implementation of CSE in educational institutions at its different levels.

In 2006, the National Comprehensive Sexual Education Program was created with the main purpose of coordinating the design, implementation and evaluation of actions throughout the country. In this context, in 2008 the document "Curricular Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexual Education" was drawn up, which constitutes the first level of curriculum development in relation to the CSE and sets forth training purposes and suggested basic contents for all levels and modalities of the educational system of the country. In this regard, in relation to the place of schools, the CSE Law establishes that "Each educational community must include the process of preparing its institutional project, adapting these guidelines to its socio-cultural reality, within the framework of respect to its institutional ideology and the convictions of its members".<sup>1</sup>

This is to ensure the exercise of the rights to education and health to all children and young people who attend school. The sexual education that it raises is one that promotes an integral formation, based on scientific and ethical knowledge and positions the school as a fundamental stage in the construction of sexual citizenship.

### *1.2 From What Perspective Is Sexual Integral Education Proposed?*

We start from the idea that sexual education has always existed, either by "action" or by "omission". In our country, the explicit approach to sexuality in schools has been predominantly through hegemonic approaches: either biomedical and/or moralizing. These models share the assumption that sexuality is generally expressed in genitality, with special emphasis on control through abstinence [3].

With the current perspective, an integral education with a gender perspective, rights, diversity and affectivity is proposed. Thus, the CSE in the school,

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<sup>1</sup> Ley 26.150 en Lineamientos Curriculares para la Educación Sexual Integral. Programa Nacional de Educación Sexual Integral. Ministerio de Educación. ISBN 978-950-00-0695-8.

constitutes “a systematic space of teaching and learning that includes contents of different curricular areas, appropriate to the ages of boys and girls, and dealt with transversally and/or in specific spaces. It includes the development of knowledge and skills for the care of one’s own body; the assessment of emotions and feelings and interpersonal relationships, the promotion of values and attitudes related to love, solidarity, respect for life and the integrity of people and the exercise of rights related to sexuality. It also promotes articulated work with families, health centers and social organizations”. [4]

In this context, the SPCSE was created in 2010. Its main objective is to carry out the implementation of the CSE in all the schools, in the levels of initial, primary and secondary education. The approach is carried out following the modality of workshops of CSE and to gradually involve the whole educational community, in pursuit of a transversal approach.

In relation to the arrival of CSE in the classroom, new challenges arise, which propose new forms of teaching and learning. The perspectives of gender, human rights, diversity and affectivity take center stage. The “staging” of the curricular spaces is carried out through a dialogical-participative methodology, with dynamics that propose the ludic and the integration of corporeity.

The actions carried out within the framework of the program involve the work located in the schools, together with the management personnel, the teachers and other institutional actors, through the continuous teacher training, the accompaniment “in the classrooms”, the realization of workshops with families and other actions that are carried out towards the community. In this way, the school gradually positions itself as a promoter of the sexual health of the community of belonging.

In this work, the focus is the stories of the educators who carry out the CSE experience in the primary level, also in the voices of the management team, to know their feelings and inquire about what happens when

the prescriptive curriculum is put into action.

In order to know the meanings given by teachers to CSE, we think it is pertinent to mention the approach that Schutz proposes (1970, 1971, 1982) when he argues that each social actor has knowledge that depends on his own experience, on his “biographical situation” from which one reacts, they attribute meanings according to their history of life and knowledge [5]. In addition, we consider it appropriate to make visible some tensions related to the regulation of ideologies and power that are put into play. According to Foucault (2003) “educational spaces are configured by regulated meanings and powers that speak *of and* sexuality”. [6]

## 2. Methodology

This preliminary study is exploratory and descriptive in nature. The methodology used was qualitative. In regard to information gathering techniques, we worked in combination with the use of semi-structured surveys and in-depth interviews [7].

Two instruments were implemented to collect data: semi-structured surveys carried out with teachers and in-depth interviews with managers. As a selection criterion, the surveys were intended for the teaching staff (teachers of primary education), pedagogical advisors and management team and that the in-depth interviews were conducted with the members of the management team who were directly involved in implementation of the CSE in the school.

The survey was applied individually, in virtual form (Google Drive) and in person. The participation was voluntary, involving 13 people out of the 21 participants. We inquired about the training received, the self-assessment as a sex educator, aspects that are considered relevant to deepen. Likewise, we sought to know about the feelings and emotions that are presented when dealing with sexual education with students and families; the assessment of the different axes of the same, concerns and limitations, and about the support networks for the CSE approach. With

open questions, they were invited to share significant experiences, transformations as educator and students when developing the CSE and the initial resistances.

The interviews were conducted personally to 5 key informants in different environments. The guide of 10 semi-open questions was implemented, while at the same time the necessary aspects that arose from it were deepened. In the interviews, questions were opened that inquired about the motivation to undertake the subject, the contributions that the CSE offered to comprehensive education, the difficulties to approach it in the educational institutions, the resistance for its implementation in the current context at the political level and educational, student response, possible actions to strengthen the proposal and future perspectives.

Subsequently, the information was collected, the questionnaires were revised and similar or relevant data were selected, while graphics were made that complemented the analysis. Then the transcription of each interview was made, the units of meanings and themes were identified, comparing them and contrasting them with each other and with the questionnaires. Codes and categories were established. They elaborated concepts or central ideas, established relationships and final reflections of the work [7].

### 3. Results

Below we will express some results that we consider relevant in this preliminary study.

#### 3.1 *Self-perception of the Teacher as a Sex Educator: Feelings, Emotions and Received Training*

When inquiring about the education received in sexual education, 31% state that they have received it in the framework of the SPCSE, 15% in other official institutions outside the SPCSE, 7% in the degree program, 8% in the courses or short workshops, and 39% in other areas. Most of them refer to having been trained in theoretical and methodological aspects of the CSE and in specific topics such as gender,

diversity, prevention of sexual abuse. To a lesser extent, they state that they have been trained in theoretical foundations and action strategies to face specific problems.

When asked to assess their training, 50% of respondents consider the same as “average”; and the rest as “rather high” and “high” in equal proportions.

In relation to their feelings when approaching the CSE, the majority of the teachers say they feel comfortable and in the particular case of the approach with the families they feel comfortable and interested.

Regarding the support networks for the CSE approach, they are supported by the SPCSE coordination team mainly, by other colleagues and by the bibliography in equal parts and to a lesser extent by the school managers, this is also made explicit when they state that the implementation of the CSE has allowed it “to have more material, more experience and more support with qualified professionals in the field” (Teacher).

#### 3.2 *Some Obstacles and Resistances*

When one inquired about the main obstacles that were presented at the beginning of the implementation of the CSE, lack of training on the topic and how to deal with it arises first, followed by considering themselves carriers of fears or prejudices and insecurity before the interpellation of the families of the students. This becomes evident when they state in relation to resistance, among others:

“Resistance: my own.” Teacher.

“The main resistance is on the part of some teachers, for the lack of training, and the lack of tools to apply it effectively and safely.” Teacher.

“The family, some colleagues.” Teacher.

Also within the obstacles, the strong teacher education tradition appears both in their training and in their teaching practice. These are revealed in some of their statements, such as:

“The bodies clinging to the chairs.” Teacher.

“Naturalized school practices such as: the organization of students in the ranks of boys and girls.” Teacher.

Likewise, from the interviews carried out with the school management team, it is inferred that these instances of resistance can be related to different crossing of transdisciplinary borders, such as:

“The resistance has to do with the subjective views, that many times one feels interpellated, what has to do with teacher training on the one hand, and with the personal views on the other in terms of traversing and therefore the complexity of the subject...” SPCSE coordinator.

“...Many times the resistance has to do with difficulties in the implementation and the approach, beyond the political support, we find resistance because some teachers never end up feeling sufficiently trained or prepared to do it because they feel challenged and sometimes displeased with religion, with the political issues...” SPCSE coordinator.

“Resistance has to do with time, more time, more process of reflection on oneself with sexuality, more accompaniment, more joint work...” Pedagogical advisor.

Despite these initial difficulties, in the process of implementing the CSE, some teachers say that they have increasingly relied on discourse and action, but in other cases there are still instances of resistance to training, teamwork, to planning that requires extra time. In this sense, we highlight some appreciations:

“Personally, at first I did not know or was afraid to answer questions or did not know how to address some issues ... Families accompany and also use CSE workshops to work on the various problems that arise.” Teacher.

“The obstacles that a teacher can bring with preparation, reading, sharing experiences, knowing how, when at what time I say ... is part of a preparation. Fears and taboos are being diluted more and more.” Principal.

### *3.3 Potentials and Strengths ESI*

#### *3.3.1 About Personal Transformations*

The following question was asked: Have you experienced any transformation as an educator when developing CSE? Among the transformations that stand out, is the expiration of one’s own resistance, taboos and prejudices; a growth in training and teaching practices, openness to new questions, greater inclusion, the assessment of affectivity and other links that place the teacher as an emotional reference. Next, we transcribe some of their statements in this regard:

“My biggest transformation has to do with a baggage of new knowledge and the possibility of opening the body for teaching CSE.” Teacher.

“I could see the subject from another perspective, revising taboos or prejudices.” Teacher.

“Yes, I have shown a transformation in my training. Despite the resistance” Teacher.

“Meetings give me experiences and questions...” Teacher.

“I feel that I have achieved a closer relationship with young people, who see us as adults to trust...” Teacher.

“It could be as a transformation of my teaching practices, by incorporating a transversal approach of the CSE into the other curricular areas the contents.” Teacher.

“Yes, about the transmission of affectivity of the children.” Teacher.

“Yes, greater openness of teachers, school managers and students to the integration of students with different abilities, not only because they have the support of a companion in the classroom, but also because it is their right and they live it without any resistance.” Guiding teacher.

“Each experience allows us to transform ourselves, enrich our knowledge and be able to offer our students better proposals. The work developed with each group is different and in part it allows us to grow and transform.” Teacher.

“My experience of continuing to strengthen myself as an educator.” Teacher.

“I have lost my fear of a lot of subjects that were taboo, now I encourage myself to speak from the knowledge.” Teacher.

“Teachers move from a concern to an occupation in the subject.” School manager.

### *3.4 Approach CSE in the Classroom: New Ways of Teaching and Learning Are Envisioned*

The experience is valued positively by the teachers when they answer the question: Have you shown any transformation in the students when developing the CSE? In general, the opening and demand of new meetings is emphasized, a greater expression of feelings, emotions and experiences, the generation of other spaces for dialogue outside the classroom. We can highlight some expressions that demonstrate the transforming potential of CSE in the teaching and learning process such as:

“The transformation has to do with the desire to learn and always return to the spaces of the CSE as containment spaces. It has allowed us to know the suffering of childhoods in our school and intervene.” Teacher.

“Interest and curiosity in students are triggered by different topics and questions that do not know how to ask or talk about them and in these encounters they are encouraged.” Teacher.

“They can talk and tell their experiences openly.” Teacher.

“Yes, young people eagerly await workshops, many take the opportunity to find answers, almost everyone is an opportunity to discover the body and sexuality are worthy and beautiful, each person with their identity and orientation is perfect.” Teacher.

“They wait with enthusiasm every meeting and in the other areas too, they show confidence and express everything they want to express at that moment (in the classes).” Teacher.

“In the classroom since they start having these meetings they talk to one in a more uninhibited way from the workshops.” Teacher.

“I emphasize how the workshops continue outside the workshops, in the corridors, especially.” Teacher.

## **4. Conclusions**

In this work we have presented part of the experience, with some achievements and pending challenges, among them the realization of transversality in all the curricular spaces and in the daily school practices referred to the CSE.

It should be noted that the professors who incorporated the CSE perspective and positioned themselves as sexual educators, despite the initial resistance or fears, manage to perceive it as a transformative experience in the personal and professional, enabling new knowledge and questions and new ways of building good relationships with students, colleagues and families. According to a teacher, new opportunities appear: “Each experience allows us to transform ourselves, enrich our knowledge and be able to offer our students better proposals. The work developed with each group is different and in part it allows us to grow and transform”.

These transformations are significant and manifest themselves in various ways such as “wanting to learn and always return to the meetings of the CSE”, new possibilities are enabled “the transmission of affectivity of children”, “... the workshops continue outside the workshops, in the corridors”, and voices “They can talk and tell their experiences openly...” However, those who fail to incorporate this new perspective, feel it as a requirement and show resistance, which is visualized in the classrooms and in everyday practices. Regarding personal resistances and teamwork, we agreed with Ref. [8] who argues that “CSE does not only address the systematic knowledge of the formation, but more strongly to the belief value systems of the teachers and their social and personal experiences as sexed bodies”.

The school has historically prioritized reason, to the detriment of the emotional, the singular, the subjective, the intuitive, and the “sexed” body. “Historically, in

our country, both in teacher training and in school, affectivity has not been a priority. In the educational system, when selecting content, conceptual and methodological aspects have been privileged over attitudinal ones". [9]

These sexed bodies also communicate in the form of resistances and as a silent claim. Putting into play the feelings, values and emotions favors the development of affective capacities and in some cases allows the visibility of tensions or conflicts.

Also, from an institutional perspective, we see that some teachers or school managers reflectively follow a traditional, more conservative school system perspective.

For the comprehensive education of the sex educator, there are various tools that allow "integrating feeling, thinking and doing" [10]. In this line, we understand the importance of sustaining opportunities for ongoing teacher education that promotes teacher training, self-reflection, to make visible the sexosophy itself and enable a scientific and ethical sex education, because as we said before, we consider who educates "always educates sexually".

To conclude, we recognize the great transforming potential of the CSE. Its implementation requires a systemic, systematized and sustainable change. According to Morgade [11], we consider that "worth since the CSE makes the school more just, but also more interesting." In this sense, those who are part of this program are highly committed to the development of strategies to deal with the difficulties and weaknesses so as to meet the needs of each school community. Therefore, the participants understand that the actions and activities carried out in the program tend to improve the ways of building relationships within each school context and to make the respect for human rights visible and real, which are principles and convictions that are supported by the faculty policies.

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