

# **“I Try to be Non-Biased, but I Know I am Affected by Hetero Norms”**

A Survey on Teachers' Competencies in Sexuality Education,  
Grades 7-9 on Åland

Linda Budd

Master's Thesis

Thesis for Master of Health Care

Degree Programme in Health Care and Social Services

Åbo, 2023

**DEGREE THESIS**

Author: Linda Budd

Degree Program and place of study: Master of Health Care and Social Services, Åbo

Supervisor: Pia Liljeroth

Title: "I Try to be Non-Biased, but I Know I am Affected by Hetero Norms" - A Survey on Teachers' Competencies in Sexuality Education, Grades 7-9 on Åland

---

Date: 17.04.2023

Number of pages: 51

Appendices: 2

---

**Abstract**

In 2021 the Government of Åland, updated the curriculum for elementary schools. The curriculum for sexuality education as a part of health education was also updated, and the teaching goals were clearly highlighted.

The aim of this master's thesis was to evaluate the educator's level of knowledge and figure out possible challenges when teaching sexuality education, considering the latest updated curriculum.

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with seven health education teachers for grades 7-9. The findings of this study highlighted three main themes: the performance of education, the importance of the subject and the teachers' needs.

There are challenges facing educators of sexuality education such as difficulties in finding useful training for professional development, lack of time for teaching and the production of teaching materials and the lack of acknowledgement of the importance of the subject from decision-makers. Specific challenges were mentioned in integrating LGBTQ+ into teaching.

Teachers need more resources such as time and collaboration platforms where they can both arrange the frameworks for sexuality education and develop their professionalism together with colleagues. This kind of arrangement would secure the quality of sexuality education in schools.

---

Language: English

Key Words: sexuality education, curriculum, LGBTQ+

## EXAMENSARBETE

Författare: Linda Budd

Utbildning och ort: Master of Health Care and Social Services, Åbo

Handledare: Pia Liljeroth

Titel: "I try to be non-biased, but I know I am affected by hetero norms" - A survey on teachers' competencies in sexuality education, grades 7-9 on Åland.

---

Datum: 17.04.2023

Sidantal: 51

Bilagor: 2

---

### Abstrakt

År 2021 uppdaterade Ålands landskapsregering läroplanen för grundskolorna. Läroplanen för sexualundervisning som en del av hälsoundervisningen uppdaterades också och undervisningens mål förtydligades.

Syftet med denna avhandling var att utvärdera lärarens kompetens och ta reda på möjliga utmaningar de möter i samband med sexualundervisning, med den nya läroplanen i åtanke.

Data samlades in genom semistrukturerade intervjuer med 7 hälsokunskaps lärare för årskurs 7–9. Resultaten av studien lyfte fram tre huvudteman: sexualundervisningen som skolämne, vikten av sexualundervisning samt lärarnas behov.

Det finns utmaningar för utbildare av sexualundervisning såsom svårigheter att hitta meningsfulla fortbildningar för professionell utveckling, tidsbrist för undervisning och förberedande av undervisningsmaterial samt bristande förståelse från beslutsfattare för ämnets viktighet. Specifika utmaningar nämndes för en HBTQIA+ inklusive undervisningen.

Lärare behöver mer resurser som tid och en samarbetsplattform där de både kan ordna ramarna för sexualundervisningen och utveckla sin professionalitet tillsammans med kollegor. Denna typ av arrangemang skulle säkra kvaliteten på sexualundervisningen i skolorna.

---

Språk: Engelska

Nyckelord: sexuality education, curriculum, LGBTQ+

## Table of Contents

1	Introduction .....	1
2	Theoretical Background .....	2
2.1	Sexuality, Global perspective .....	2
2.2	Sexuality education in school .....	8
2.3	Sexuality education in Finland .....	12
2.4	sexuality education in Åland.....	14
3	Aim of the thesis .....	15
4	Methodology.....	15
4.1	Data collection .....	16
4.2	Interview guide .....	17
4.3	Qualitative analysis.....	18
5	Results .....	20
5.1	Sexuality education for grades 7-9 on Åland.....	20
5.1.1	Curriculum .....	20
5.1.2	Learning environment.....	22
5.1.3	Teaching methods and materials .....	22
5.2	Sexuality education, a subject different from others: .....	24
5.2.1	Importance of sexuality education .....	24
5.2.2	Characteristics of sexuality education.....	25
5.2.3	Challenges in teaching .....	27
5.2.4	Extern experts.....	28
5.3	Teachers' needs.....	30
5.3.1	Teachers' working situation.....	30
5.3.2	Improvement of sexuality education and teachers' professional development.....	32
6	Analysis of the findings .....	33
6.1	School-based sexuality education in Åland.....	33
6.2	Uniqueness of the subject .....	35
6.3	Educators.....	39
7	Conclusion.....	42
8	Ethical Considerations and validity of the study .....	43
9	Discussion .....	44
	References .....	48

**Appendices:**

**Appendix1:** Initial codes of the transcription

**Appendix2:** Coding of the main categories

## 1 Introduction

Sexuality education as a school curriculum subject started officially in Sweden as the first European country to make the subject mandatory in all schools in 1955. The development of the teaching regarding the material, educators and frameworks took many years and therefore also the integration of the subject into the curriculums. During 1970 and 1980 sexuality education was adopted by many other European countries, starting in the Scandinavian countries, and later elsewhere. Sexuality education needs to be appropriate regarding the development level of the children, referring to what is needed, relevant and what is of interest at a certain age or development phase (BZgA Federal Centre for Health Education, 2010). In Finland sexuality education officially became a school subject in 1970, regulated by the Finnish National Board of Education and Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The subject is integrated into health education aiming to improve sexuality knowledge and develop adolescents' sexual health. Already in kindergarten some elements of sexuality education begin and continue comprehensively and age appropriately through primary school focusing on basic biological and emotional issues. In grades 7 to 9 information about adolescents' physical, psychological and social development is added to the basic knowledge in sexuality education which should help students understand human relationships, communication, responsibility, mutual care in human interactions and well-being (Kontula 1997, Kontula & Meriläinen, 2007, Kontula 2014).

National-level curricula in response to WHO European Regions' qualification requirements for sexuality education were issued in 2014 for primary schools and in 2015 for secondary and vocational schools. The approach for the framework is normative, comprehensive and age appropriate. Municipalities are responsible actors for the local school syllabus. Topics being highlighted are such as biological aspects, pregnancy and childbirth, contraception, STIs: s and HIV, safe abortion, and online media (BZgA, 2018).

Due to the special position of the Åland Islands, as an autonomous region, the Parliament of the Åland Islands enacts the legislative right concerning education and schools of the region. The parliament law number 2020:32, part 3, chapter 3, § 10-12 includes the

regulations for the educational framework (ÅLR, 2020). According to the updated curriculum for the elementary schools of the Åland Island (The Government of Åland, 2021) sexuality education for 7th to 9th graders comes as a part of health education under the headline "growth and development". Health Education in the latest updated curriculum is described as a school subject based on many different scientific branches. The training aims to promote knowledge that will support the health and safety of young people. The education goal is to promote the development of cognitive, social, physical, emotional, functional, and ethical skills by giving the students versatile knowledge about health. Through the empowering approach of the training, students will learn how to search for, apply and critically review information concerning health and wellbeing. The training is supposed to focus on norm awareness, contribute to equality, equity, and solidarity, and highlight the importance of diversity. It is mentioned that gender perspective must be considered in the training (ÅLR2020/9841 83 U2).

This master thesis focuses on mapping the competence of those being responsible for sexuality education for 7th to 9th graders in elementary schools around the Åland Islands. By interviewing teachers responsible for teaching the topic the survey aims to get a clearer picture of the teachers' perspective on their level of knowledge in the subject and the challenges they might face in their work as educators of sexuality education.

## **2 Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 Sexuality, Global perspective**

The definition of sexuality varies depending on an individual's age and levels of development, which means children's sexuality is not the same as adults' sexuality (WHO & BZgA, 2010). According to WHO (2006a), the working definition of sexuality is:

*"...a central aspect of being human throughout life encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles, and relationships..."*

*Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious, and spiritual factors."*

In 2002 a convened technical committee for WHO resulted in internationally agreed working definitions defining some of the concepts around sex, sexuality, sexual health, and sexual rights. So far not taken as official definitions, they are available on WHO's website and are increasingly being used. Humans are through their biological characteristics defined as male and female, and some individuals possess both sets of these attributes. These biological characteristics are referred to as the term sex, which often is used as a word meaning "sexual activity" in many languages.

For my study I've chosen to use the WHO's definitions of sexuality-related phrases due to the framework being based on the United Nations declaration of basic human rights. Comprehensive sexuality education is grounded on the United Nations' human rights related to sexuality which include the right for everybody to be informed. For young people to build and maintain satisfactory and consensual relationships sexuality education should start long before young people become sexually active (IPPF 2016a, IPPF 2008, Bonjour & van der Vlugt, 2018).

Good sexual and reproductive health implies that people can have a satisfying and safe sexual life, and decide when, how and how often to reproduce. For being able to do so, people need access to correct information and accessibility to safe, effective, affordable, and acceptable contraceptive methods. Individuals must be informed and empowered in their sexual safety and when they decide to have children, women must have access to skilled maternal care that can help them have a fit pregnancy, safe birth, and healthy babies. Every individual has the right to make their own choices about their sexual and reproductive health. UNFPA, together with a wide range of partners, works toward the goal of universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, including family planning (United Nations Population Fund, 2022).

The development of human sexuality starts while still in the uterus and continues during the lifetime of individuals (WHO & BZgA, 2010). The World Health Organization [WHO] (2006) has defined sexual health as:



*“A state of physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being related to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction, or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence. For sexual health to be maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected, and fulfilled.”(p.5)*

Across the world, young people are being more and more recognized as sexual beings, and they have fundamental rights to learn about sexuality and sexual health (Nunez et al. 2018). Sexuality education starts early in childhood aiming to learn to support and protect young people in their sexual development. Progressing through adolescence and adulthood sexuality education embraces learning about the cognitive, emotional, social, interactive, and physical aspects of human sexuality. With information and skills achieved by comprehensive sexuality education children and young people, gradually are equipped and empowered to understand and enjoy their sexuality, take responsibility for their own and others' well-being, as well have a positive attitude towards fulfilling relationships. The competence of educators is the very heart of sexual competence. Educators do not need to be high-level professionals, but they should ideally be trained to deliver proper knowledge. The absence of trained educators may not be used as an excuse for not delivering sexuality education, but preferably should sexuality education be introduced while still training to become a teacher. Educators need training both for openness to the subject and firmly believing in the fundamentals of sexuality education as well for maintaining a high level of motivation to teach. Authorities should not force anyone to teach sexuality education, instead, they need to stimulate and support teachers in their work as educators. Based on human rights and with the ascendance for diversities, educators should present facts and help learners to develop appropriate attitudes and skills for self-reflection, problem-solving, communication and negotiation (WHO, 2016).

In Ceder et al.'s (2022) book, it's been mentioned that in 2018 the inspection done by Swedish school authorities showed that many schools are lacking existing plans for intersectional and comprehensive sexuality education. A joint strategy for different parts of the curriculum as well as what topics should be taught in different school subjects is

often missing. Few schools seem to have a comprehensive perspective concerning sexuality and biology seems to be dominating subject when teaching sexuality. Educators need to understand their mission in dealing with topics such as norms, gender roles, sexuality, consent, and relationships from different subjects' didactical perspectives (Ceder et al. 2022).

In 2010, WHO's federal centre for health education, highlighted the need for updated frameworks for sexuality education around Europe, considering current changes in societies with globalization, the internet and the ambition of equity and equal rights for LGBTI+ persons. Through their work in coordinating and creating frameworks for sexuality education, the WHO and UNESCO play an important role in the international arena (WHO & BZgA, 2010; UNESCO, 2018). One practical product for sexuality education is the "It's all one curriculum" (Barker, 2011), which is a comprehensive source for curriculum development, specifically in the areas of gender, sexuality, and HIV. It's all one, strengthens the overall education by bringing a critical thinking approach to the learning process. The implicit objective of the curriculum is to navigate young people to advocate for their rights to dignity, and equality and enjoy satisfying responsible and healthy sexual lives. The seven key standards for "It's all one" are:

- Evidence based on global research standards
- Comprehensively covering sexuality and life education
- Human Rights based
- Paying attention to gender equality
- Encouragement for critical thinking
- Empowerment in building companionate societies
- Contemplate diverse circumstances (Barker, 2011).

The fact is that gender norms profoundly affect young people's ability to make and implement decisions regarding their own sexual lives. For example, the unforgivable reality is that sex, marriage, and pregnancy remain neither voluntary nor informed for tens of millions of girls. Boys, too, often experience intense pressures to live up to unrealistic and harmful expectations of manhood. The consequences are real. Studies from both

developing and developed countries confirm that young people who believe in gender equality have better sexual health outcomes than their peers. In contrast, those young people who hold lighter equal attitudes tend to have worse sexual health outcomes. For example, young people who believe that males should be “tough” and should hold more power than females are less likely to use condoms or contraception and more likely to have multiple sex partners. They are also more likely to be in intimate relationships that involve violence. Females in relationships with a high level of male control are also more likely to report HIV and unintended pregnancy. Similarly reflecting this constellation of gender inequality and poor sexual health are studies showing that intimate partner violence is associated with higher rates of unintended pregnancy, STIs, and HIV. These findings make clear that young people need chances to learn about gender equality and human rights, particularly because these issues affect their sexual lives, and indeed, their happiness (Barker, 2011).

Strongly linked with empowerment, gender equality and human rights-based, comprehensive sexuality education is described as a positive approach to sexuality, accepting feeling, desire, and pleasure as essential parts of sexuality (IPPF, 2017; WHO & BZgA, 2010). Comprehensive sexuality education is informative concerning risks related to sexuality without amplifying fear, shame, or taboo (IPPF, 2011). In addition to physical and emotional perspective, comprehensive sexuality education includes features like friendship, the feeling of safety, and gender security and promotes values such as gender equality, respect for others, rights and exclusion and sexual violence (IPPF, 2017; WHO & BZgA, 2010). According to Rutgers (Bonjour & van der Vlugt, 2018), right based approach in sexuality education is rooted in the principles of young people having sexual rights which include access to information, services, and the right to make decisions about themselves. Further, a right-based approach goes beyond a health-based approach and aims to empower young people in their sexuality. Right-based approach to sexuality education is designed as an inclusive and wide curriculum highlighting gender norms, violence, individual rights, sexual orientations and expressions and pleasure. The teaching approach is participatory aiming to engage adolescence in critical thinking (Bonjour & Van der Vlugt,2018).

Jarpe-Ratner's (2020) study about LGBTQ+-inclusive sex education enumerates factors complicating teaching in the classrooms. Shortage of time and crowded and diverse classrooms that leaves students to make sense of facts on their own are some of these structural problems. Teachers are not given the structural support to go beyond introducing information, and they may lack the appropriate training to teach sexuality in an intersectional way. Thus, teachers need technical guidance for their professional development. Albert (2022) found that for teachers to create a unifying and democratic classroom culture and create teachable moments with a broad sense of health including the emotional, mental, social, and physical aspects of sexuality, more training, support and guidance are needed. To ensure safe spaces for all students, teachers need the expertise to present topics and navigate the challenges of a truly inclusive approach to sexuality education.

Most programmes in Janssens et al.'s article (2020), reviewing 76 English language programmes, focus on the prevention of unplanned or teenage pregnancy, the transmission of HIV or sexually transmitted infections or violent relationships. The differences in integrating or separating relationship skills into sexuality education approach in different countries reflect different governance and requirements. Many mainstream programmes have featured the use of passive instructions and use of film, whilst most programmes used educational strategies associated with more interactive methods such as role-play and discussion groups. Adequate training in delivering relationship and sexual education was identified as an important factor in effectiveness and teaching skills. Lack of resources was identified as the most common reason for engaging external sources for the teaching and even when external sources are used the teachers still will have to remain as the main person responsible for the training and risk losing their desexualised position with the class. It may also be to ask too far to expect individual teachers to have enough knowledge in different aspects, traditions and cultures concerning sexuality to adjust the teaching and plan tailor-made lectures that will meet everyone's needs. Outsourcing the delivery of information and education could create a safe environment for discussions and shared personal experiences. Relationship and sexuality education programmes improve young people's physical and mental well-being by developing their skills to build strong and sustained relationships (Janssens et al. 2020).

## 2.2 Sexuality education in school

During the ages, of 11-13 young people start shifting their interest to body changes, sexual organs and especially those of the opposite. During puberty, adolescents reflect on their self-image, identity, and their place in the world. Young people develop moral and intellectual capacity, and their sexuality accelerates during puberty. The differences between boys and girls become clearer. A disparity between physical and psychological development arises and young people go through a period of intense cogitation. Young people learn to think about things they haven't experienced, self-analyse becomes feasible and their problem-solving abilities grow. Between ages 12-20, sexual orientations establish leading to young people integrating and form their preferences. Physical changes in boys around ages 12-15 are the growth of pubic hair and penis, deeper voice and facial hair growth and spontaneous ejaculation. Girls have already had their growth spurt and now start to develop pubic and underarm hair. They get their first menstruation on average at the age of 12. Masturbating may increase among both sexes and adolescents must get used to their new body, feel uncomfortable and embarrassed while they can be very unsure about things being normal. Young people start seeing themselves as possible sexual partners and being attractive becomes important to them. They are very sensitive to others' opinions and are easily influenced by those of the same age. They find peers sexually attractive and gradually start finding out their sexual orientations. At this age level adolescents can have their first relationship and truly fall in love. After the age of 15 young people become more independent and are less close to their parents. They experience relationships, gain sexual experiences, and learn how to socially interact with those from the opposite sex in a respectful negotiating way (BZgA, 2018).

WHO and BZgA divide the development of children's sexuality into five phases: 0-3 years, 4-6 years, 7-9 years, 10-15 years, and 16-18 years. Sexual development is among else affected by biological, psychological, and social factors. Children actively form their sexuality (WHO & BZgA, 2010.). Most elementary sexuality education takes place at home. How guardians and caregivers talk about sexuality and respond to children's curiosity affects the sexual development of the children (Merrick & Greydanus, 2016). Although the basics for sexual development are formed at home, the school has an important role in

challenging norms and preparing students for puberty and changes related to education should lay ahead of different development phases before children reach them. A girl should know what menstruation is before she gets her first period (WHO & BZgA, 2010).

The sexuality education matrix of the WHO Regional Office for Europe and BZgA (2018) divides the goals of education concerning information, skills and attitudes adjusted to different age groups in categories of the human body, reproduction, sexuality, emotions, relationships, health and well-being, sexual rights, and social and cultural determinants of sexuality. At ages 12-15, the information about the human body should focus on body changes, body images, eating disorders, body changes throughout life and media messages about beauty ideals. The goal is for adolescents to develop skills to term with puberty, have a critical attitude to the inflow of information from media and resist peer pressure. In the fertility and reproduction part, the information is focused on contraceptives, pregnancy, facts and myths for youths to develop skills to recognize the symptoms of pregnancy, make conscious decisions and develop personal attitudes around contraception, abortion and taking mutual responsibility for contraception.

In the section sexuality, the centre of attention for knowledge is role expectations, gender differences, role behaviour about sexual arousal and how to enjoy sexuality appropriately. Young people learn skills in intimate communication and negotiation, how to enjoy sexuality respectfully, make free and responsible choices and work on attitudes for acceptance, respect and understanding of diversity in sexuality and sexual orientation. In the category of emotions, information is about differences between friendship, love, and lust where adolescents learn to express friendship and love in different ways, express their own needs, wishes and boundaries and equally respect those of others. This part helps teenagers develop attitudes to accept people's differences and how others feel due to their backgrounds, culture, religion etc. Information on relationships and lifestyle gives knowledge on developing and maintaining relationships and give young people knowledge about different communication styles, family structures and ways of living. This aims to enable teenagers to address unfairness, discrimination, and inequality and how to communicate their own expectations and needs within relationships. These skills are

supposed to help teenagers develop attitudes to understand the influence of people's lifestyles and backgrounds on relationships.

The category "sexuality, health, and well-being", gives knowledge about body hygiene and self-examination, to train young people in skills to recognize risky behaviour and, symptoms of STI: s, refuse or stop unpleasant sexual contact and develop an attitude of mutual responsibility for health and well-being related to sexuality. Sexual rights should be taught as defined by International Planned Parenthood Federation and World Association for sexual health. Teenagers are supposed to develop an attitude of acceptance and learn skills in acknowledging sexual rights for themselves and others. Finally in the part about norms and values and, social and cultural determinants of sexuality, the perspective of information about clarifying how the influence of peer pressure, media, pornography, culture, religion, gender, laws, and socioeconomic status affects sexual decisions, partnerships, and behaviour. The goal is to give youths skills in dealing with conflicting personal norms and values in the family and society and eventually develop a personal and flexible view of sexuality in a changing society or group (BZgA, 2010).

Mayeza and Louise (2019) write about sexuality education as a part of Life Orientation learning, to engage learners with knowledge and life skills in various fields of human development. Their research findings show that an optimal learning environment for sexuality education is a non-judgmental space where adolescents feel free to ask any questions about sexuality: They share views and experiences and relate to their teachers as adults in a much less authoritative way. By viewing learners as the experts of their own sexual lives, teachers find ways to re-arrange their positioning as guardian figures of formal authority over their students. The teachers' ability to embrace more democratic and empowering relationships is essential for a successful implementation of a non-judgemental and non-authoritative approach to sexuality education. Teachers' training is the key factor for the promotion of social justice and equality when teaching about sexuality. Therefore, should teachers' education programmes equip those who will teach sexuality education with skills and knowledge on how to perform sexuality education classes where heteronormativity is not being promoted, girls' perspectives are not silenced, and the gendering of abstinence is not pushed for? For good quality, comprehensive sexuality education teachers' education must be considered, and elementary school

teachers need to be properly prepared for their roles as educators and authorities need to recognize teachers' professional development as necessary (Collier-Harris & Goldman, 2017). Although school is the key factor for most high-quality sexuality education, how sexuality education is delivered is even more important than the material and curriculum itself. Teachers' knowledge and comfort level is essential when improving the delivery of sexuality education is the goal (Nurgitz et al., 2021).

According to teachers, in Depauli and Plaute's (2018) study, by implementing age-appropriate sexuality education, offered step-by-step and continuously to the children, adjusted to their individual development, the learning gaps will be avoided, and young people will no longer learn too little or nothing about their sexuality during their education. For high-quality sexuality education, the training of educators as well as the structural framework of the curriculum is extremely important. Parents of young children attach importance to and build trust in qualified teachers; therefore, teacher education programmes need to consider the level of sexuality education future educators will teach. The challenges of getting things right lie more in the depth and skills in teaching than in the subject areas themselves. When teaching sexuality education, openness to the subject and motivation for teaching is important elements but teachers need support and training, and school authorities should not pressure those unwilling to teach to deliver sexuality education and instead offer support and stimulation to get involved.

Good quality training and suitable teaching material in the development of which teachers themselves are involved, can prepare teachers, and make their work easier. When teachers take part in developing educational materials their needs will be met. It is important to consider teachers' attitudes and reflections towards sexuality alongside their willingness to conduct lessons in sexuality education, as they will serve as role models for their students (Depauli & Plaute, 2018).

Comprehensive sexuality education as the most effective approach in sexuality education, by highlighting gender and the human rights focus, is gaining acceptance globally. The empowerment approach promises inclusivity of young people in caring about their health. Efforts and actions are needed to convince governments and decision-makers to invest efforts and resources in sexuality education. Curricular significance on gender, power and



human rights improves health outcomes. To achieve important international visions and goals such as ICPD Beyond 2014 and after Millennium Development Goals and the Social Development Goals and Cairo Agenda, only information and skills as part of sexuality education are not enough, but also there is a need for empowerment through promoting gender equality and human rights. We need to find strategies for integrating knowledge about puberty, gender, and rights into education. There is also a need for robust teachers' training to allow teachers to master new pedagogies and curriculums for sexuality education (Haberland & Rogow, 2015).

Gender norms and human rights are in focus for the shift of paradigm in sexuality education, which creates demands on tools to help educators in developing the curriculum of sexuality education with critical teaching methods. The shift is taking place in a globally diverse world both geographically and culturally and teacher preparedness is a key remaining challenge. A teacher may be assigned to care for the sexuality education but lack the necessary knowledge, skills or attitudes needed for the purpose (Rogow et al. 2013). School is commonly reported as an important source of learning about sexuality, but some reports show that formal sexuality education still leaves adolescents feeling unprepared for their future sexual and relationship lives. Inadequate teaching may also lead young people to look for information from easily accessed online sources where pornography is one increasing source (Patterson et al., 2020).

### **2.3 Sexuality education in Finland**

In response to the need of the population, sexual health in Finland is interconnected between school-based sexuality education and sexual health services. After sexuality became an obligatory school subject in 1970, local municipalities became responsible for the provision of contraception counselling for the whole population in 1972. Slowly but cooperatively both education and health services have developed. In the mid-1990s, for various reasons, sexual health services were cut, and sexuality education became a non-compulsory school subject, leading to a stagnation in both the quality and quantity of sexuality education. As a result, contraceptive use among young people decreased and the number of those having their sexual onset by the ages of 15 and 16 increased. Over the

following 7 years, teenage abortion rates increased by 50%. Health education as a new school subject was introduced in 2004 and became mandatory in 2006.

In Finland, the school subject “health education” is a composition of theoretical, social, emotional, ethical and functional skills together with information-purchased abilities. Health education, aiming to develop health competence which embraces responsibility for the promotion of own and others’ sexual health, is incorporated into studies about environment and nature from ages 7-12. At ages 13-15, 7-9th grade, health education is taught as an independent subject with a total of 114 lectures.

Sexuality education as a part of health education involves human relations, sexuality, attitudes and norms and values. A nationwide survey on sexuality education in schools, performed by The Family federation Of Finland in 2006, showed that the level of sexual knowledge among young people is directly correlated to the level of school sexuality education. A clear national curriculum supports the improvement of standards for sexual health. During 1994-2004 there was no curriculum and therefore the distribution of sex education was of poor quality. The introduction of a national curriculum alongside specific teacher training resulted in improved teachers’ attitudes around sexuality education classes, whereas the large majority of teachers considered it easy to talk about sexual matters (Kontula & Meriläinen, 2007, Loeber et al. 2010).

In April 2019, the ministry of justice in Finland appointed a working group for preparing a total reform of section 20 in Finnish criminal law. This reform intends to follow the government programme “Safe and secure Finland built on the rule of law” and by carrying out a comprehensive reform of legislation on sexual offences, prepare regulations that will strengthen the importance of consent as crime props in the event of sexual violation (Finnish Ministry of Justice, 2019). This reform which will step into action from the first of January 2023 is going to strengthen every individual’s right to self-determination and the protection of personal integrity. The most important change that follow is that the new definition of sexual violation is based on consent. Rape means performing sexual actions with a person who is not participating in the activity voluntarily. The absent consent is primary even in other sexual crimes. As the reform progress the punishment of sexual crimes with become stricter. Moreover, most of the regulations beyond rape were updated

in section 20 of the Finnish criminal law. One important change is that a person can now be charged for a sexual violation even in other ways than touching another person's body when the action is sufficiently serious. Illicit distribution of photos including sexual content and different ways of online sexual infringements will now according to the new reform of criminal law be classified as criminal actions (Finnish Ministry of Justice, 2023).

There is a need for political will to provide education and comprehensive health services to equip a new cohort of young people with sustainable knowledge about sexuality and enlighten young people about all the aspects of life that will be affected by sexuality (Kontula & Meriläinen, 2007, Loeber et al. 2010).

## **2.4 Sexuality education in Åland**

In the updated curriculum for the elementary schools of the Åland Island (The Parliament of Åland, 2021) sexuality education for 7th to 9th graders comes as a part of health education under the headline "growth and development" aiming to cover the following subjects:

- Puberty from a physiological and psychological perspective
- The anatomy of genitals
- Sexuality and sexual health
- LGBTI+
- Personal integrity, respect, and consent
- Friendship and trust
- Emotions and relationships
- Contraception and STI: s
- Sexual crimes, sexual rights, and pornography
- Pregnancy
- Abortion and unintended infertility.

The purpose of learning is to process growing up and physical changes within the age group. The pupils will develop an understanding of puberty and its psychological and physiological impact on their bodies. They practise to address different psychological and physical signals and become aware of their thoughts, needs, attitudes and values and further learn how to identify, express, and regulate their emotions. The teaching will highlight questions

considering integrity, respect, consent, and harassment as well, as what to do when exposed to certain behaviours (ÅLR 2020).

### **3 Aim of the study**

This master's thesis aims to evaluate the educator's level of knowledge and what kind of challenges they face when teaching sexuality education, considering the latest updated curriculum. Findings of this study could be used in designing a tool for the development and maintenance of educators' skills and the production of the materials for teaching sexuality and relationship education. The topic for this master thesis has been chosen based on discussions with Kristin Mattsson, the equality expert at the Government of Åland, about educators' level of competence in the subject to respond to the current education plan. This collaboration will hopefully contribute to improve sexuality education in elementary schools in Åland.

The research questions are:

1. How is sexuality education being planned and performed for grades 7-9 on Åland?
2. What challenges do teachers face in their work as educators?

### **4 Methodology**

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a method where the researcher finds out about different individuals' experiences of a phenomenon, in each context. IPA researchers collect qualitative data through interviews, diaries or focus groups (Fejes & Thornberg, 2019). IPA is a qualitative study approach, where the researcher through interpretations, maps and analyse expressions in their context. Those by the informant presented expressions will through the interpretation be charted and analysed on a contextual level.

#### 4.1 Data collection

Through semi-structured dialogue, an interview is a data collection method, obtaining knowledge about the attitudes, norms, values, and opinions of the informant. The interview aims to collect the kind of information which helps us understand the experiences of the interviewed person. Semi-structured interviews are flexible and allow the interviewer to deviate from the interview guide and adjust the questioning according to the process of the ongoing dialogue and the answers are given by the informant (Fejes & Thornberg, 2019, Polit & Beck, 2010).

In my case, the procedure described above meant that I could develop my questions to get more out of the discussions by giving the informants free space to give extended answers to my questions and tell me about their experiences in the teaching environments, which I am not very familiar with. After I had contacted all elementary school principals in Åland by email and received no response, I called every principal separately by phone and was met with no interest. After some persuasion, a couple of schools principals promised to talk with their health education teachers and get back to me. I never heard from any of them.

After discussions with my contact person at the government office I contacted the teachers privately by getting their contact information from my acquaints and after getting in touch with 2 teachers they gave me information about their other colleagues whom I later contacted. Teachers from 2 of the schools let me know that they had no interest in the subject but from the rest of the schools, I was met with a positive response to my request for their participation in this survey for my master's thesis.

Before starting each interview, I informed every participant that they all participated voluntary and could interrupt at any time. All participants were promised anonymity and discretion. All I started each interview by asking the teachers about what subjects they taught, for what grades and the year of their graduation. Before asking the actual interview question I asked every teacher about their basic competence for teaching sexuality. All of the teachers but one was subject teachers for health education often parallel to other subjects such as physical education, mathematics etc. and were specialized to teach health

education during their basic teacher's education. The sexuality education part had been a small part of their subject teachers' studies in health education studies. One of the teachers had the experience of teaching sexuality education without being a health education subject teacher and was offered to take extra courses funded by their employer which they had accepted, and those schoolings were shorter training for health education teachers.

I had formed 8 questions which considering the current research findings seemed adequate and covered by study. I interviewed a total of 7 teachers all teaching grades 7-9, graduated from the year 2004-2016. The interviews were recorded by the "audio recorder" application on my smartphone, which all participants were asked and consented to. After each interview, I wrote down the dialogues in text format. Each interview lasted for about 30-60 minutes. Participants were all anonymized because we live on a small island, and recognition otherwise would have been easy.

## **4.2 Interview guide**

By studying the definitions of sexuality and sexual health by WHO (2002) and The Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe (BZgA, 2010), and considering the aim of this master's thesis I formed a questionnaire for interviews with teachers in health education. The questions are formed in a way that I believe will cover the subject in a way that can answer my research questions. The interviews aimed to map the teachers' perspectives of their competence in teaching sexuality education and how they believe they cover the requirements of the curriculum for the elementary schools' health education. Although the interviews were performed semi-structurally and followed a dialogue the following questions functioned as a supportive base so that I could check whether all my questions were answered to during the interview and if some details were left out, I asked separately about that specific detail. The questions I focused on during the interviews were as followed:

1. How familiar are you with the goals for learning health education in the last updated curriculum for grades 7-9?
2. Do you know what subjects are supposed to be taught in the part "growth and development"?

3. Is sexuality education important in your opinion?
4. From what age/class, is it appropriate to start learning about sexuality?
5. Do you feel comfortable teaching sexuality education? What parts are more/less difficult for you?
6. Have you got enough knowledge and skills to fulfil the demands for teaching sexuality education according to the recent curriculum?
7. How do you plan your classes? What materials/methods do you use? Goals? Have you changed anything since the renewal of the curriculum? Collaboration with other teachers/subjects?
8. Do you feel like getting enough support/schooling/motivation from the school authorities and decision makers with evolving and keeping updated with the development of sexuality education?

### **4.3 Qualitative analysis**

For this thesis, I have chosen to do qualitative analysis since the collected data is derived from interviews transcript into narrative material. Qualitative data analysis requires creativity to understand the material we are analysing so that the results are presented reliably. There are no fixed standards for the analytic procedure which makes the process of presenting the material analysis in a trustworthy way challenging. Furthermore, in qualitative analysis, an enormous amount of work is required when organizing and making sense of narrative material. Powerful inductive skills are required to do quantitative analysis appropriately and reduce material for reporting without reducing the reliability of the results.

Data analysis through Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis means always interoperating. The researcher approaches the data from the perspective of his or her experiences and understandings. Different events and expressions send a variety of messages to the researcher which she or he must clarify. The circulating movement will ease the continuous reading of the text. New understandings generate new questions which by further reading regulate new ideas, and thoughts and develop the comprehension

of the topic (Fejes & Thornberg, 2019). After transcription of the interview material, I read the text multiple times to get familiar with my material (Clarke & Braun, 2006).

I reduced the material into different lines to be able to easily see what each line is about. The reduction is about keeping the good part of the material without leaving anything important behind. This step could resemble editing a movie: all the material can't be represented but it has still to make sense. By sorting and reducing the analyst aims to create order and sharpness (Ahrne & Svensson, 2022). After the reduction and lining up, I read through all the lines multiple times and 9 initial codes (appendix 1.) emerged: Curriculum, Teachers' professional development, characteristics of sexuality education, Challenges in teaching, Learning environment, Extern experts, teaching materials and methods, and Suggestions for improvement.

Thereafter I read through the lines again to be able to divide all the material into these 9 codes. These codes emerged from repetitions and similar statements. The codes worked as labels for collecting several statements that reminded of each other under the same caption or title (Ahrne & Svensson, 2022). The idea of the chart (appendix 1) comes from Augustinsson et al. (2017). After designing the chart, I moved on to copy-pasting citations into a table under each initial code. Later I noticed that some of the citations could fit in under several codes. After a discussion with my supervisor, I could see that some codes could be reduced into one category.

After this step, I ended up with 3 main categories (appendix 2) where I could fit the initial nine codes and subcategories. By doing so all the material was analysed and categorized properly and I felt nothing was left outside. Those three categories are: "Sexuality education for grades 7-9 in Åland", "Sexuality education, a subject different from others" and "teachers' needs". Further, I had to check that these categories were uniform and did answer my research questions. In the next step, I named my categories and subcategories to polish them and make them as descriptive as possible for the content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For the final step, I wrote the content of my chart (appendix 1) as an analytic report starting with listing the themes under my research questions and then analysing them. Finally, I reviewed the wholeness of the results and adjusted the titles to the results' text (Braun & Clarke, 2006).



## 5 Results

By thematically analysing and categorizing the material, eventually, 3 head themes emerged concerning the teaching of sexuality education, challenges, and improvement according to teachers' views. These 3 head themes include sub-themes related to them. By presenting these results the findings of this project will initially be presented and hopefully, ideas about implementation and creation of a working tool will emerge.

### 5.1 Sexuality education for grades 7-9 on Åland

In this part, teachers explained the purpose of the curriculum as well as their perspectives on it, their contribution to the curriculum material, their responsibilities in creating an appropriate learning environment for sexuality education, as well their thoughts about the material being used for sexuality education and their methods of teaching.

#### 5.1.1 Curriculum

The new curriculum for sexuality education was known to all teachers and even if some responders expressed that they didn't have detailed knowledge of the material, they were all acquainted with the content. Some of the interview persons had even contributed to the material and the design of the curriculum and health education teachers were allowed to share their opinions during the formation of the new curriculum.

*"... I am acquainted with the curriculum, but I don't have detailed knowledge..."*

*"... teachers contributed to the material for the curriculum..."*

Teachers somehow expressed that the first year with the new curriculum was more of an evaluation year, where they didn't change their teaching strategies so much but more of evaluating students' different levels of knowledge depending on which schools they came from when they started seventh grade.

*"... this year is evaluation year, not much has changed..."*

*"...there are differences between different schools, therefore, same basics are as before..."*

Some of the teachers give lectures only for specific grades and therefore never get to teach some parts of the curriculum, and some claim by dividing the curriculum into very separate parts gaps in knowledge may occur when students end up changing schools.

*"...when you teach a specific grade, you might never get into some parts of the curriculum..."*

The curriculum works as the governing document and essential framework for sexuality education in schools and teachers often discuss the content with their colleagues, check the list of criteria to plan their work and use the curriculum for assessing students' level of knowledge.

*"...curriculum is the guideline. Guidelines are essential for our work..."*

However, some of the teachers claimed that sexuality can't be taught or assessed like other school subject due to the characteristics. Sexuality education was described as an important and intimate subject where attention should be mostly focused on attitudes and values, and these aspects need to be taken into consideration when planning the curriculum and goals for school sexuality education.

*"...sexuality is a personal subject... it can't be taught like another school subject...this should be paid attention to when planning the curriculum..."*

Time shortage forces teachers to make priorities when planning and teaching sexuality. Although following the curriculum teachers were aware of sexuality being the kind of subject that is not supposed to be taught as a monologue and there is a need for teachers to be flexible and have to ability to improvise. Some of the participants expressed that the assessment criteria of the curriculum are somehow vague and goals for learning are not very clear.

*"...in the new curriculum teaching goals are not clear, assessment criteria are vague..."*

*"...due to shortage of time, we have to make priorities..."*

### 5.1.2 Learning environment

According to the teachers who participated in the interviews school is the perfect environment for learning about sexuality. School is a neutral platform, where the fundamental of learning is based on open-mindedness. The teaching is based on evidence and reliable sources. Is according to the interview participants the responsibility of teachers to create a safe and comfortable learning environment free from prejudices about sexuality education. Teachers' attitude is very important when talking about sexuality. By showing themselves confidence, playing down the drama and making agreements on classroom conditions, teachers spread an atmosphere of safety where they share the right kind of information and wake awareness of myths as well pay attention to the different levels of knowledge among their students. I asked teachers if they felt that LGBTI+ issues were naturally integrated into the classroom atmosphere, and they expressed that the school environment is not yet where it should be considering LGBTI+ and that students with other orientations than heterosexuality might not feel comfortable expressing themselves freely in the classroom but they were all aware of it being teachers' responsibility to help students with deviant orientations to stand up for themselves. The home climate is also important for sexuality education according to interview participants because many values come from homes, but the factual part of the sexuality education should come from school to make sure all get the same and reliable information.

*"Teachers must make students aware of myths, talk to them about the flow of information and help them with their stress around sexuality..."*

*"...we are not yet there where LGBTI+ issues are fully natural... the teacher must make them feel safe to stand up for themselves..."*

*"...Sexuality education starts in homes and goes hand in hand with schools' sexuality education. Home climate put in the values of the children."*

### 5.1.3 Teaching methods and materials

Participants said that they use different methods and materials when teaching sex education. They adjust their teaching strategies according to the target group and use different methods depending on the construction and dynamics of the group and discussion seems to be the method that most participants consider the production method when learning about sexuality.

*"Group dynamics and hierarchy within different classes have an impact on how we get the discussions rolling..."*

*A couple of the participants mentioned that since heterosexuality is the orientation of the majority, they focus the teaching mostly on heterosexual bases.*

*"... the majority are heterosexual so I can't put all my focus on LGBTI+..."*

The lack of collaboration with school nurses in the actualization and planning of the school sexuality education was mentioned as a shortage in resources. Since school nurses are no longer directly employed by schools, but by governmental health care sector and only stationed in the schools, they can no longer be automatically involved in the planning of sexuality education lecture.

*"...earlier we could collaborate with school nurses, but they are no longer employed by school ..."*

Teaching methods are usually: PowerPoint slides, discussions (small groups in pairs and the whole class), movies, video clips, flyers, role play, articles and stories. The classes are also often divided into groups of boys and girls because according to the participants, it is the best way to make them reflect on the sexuality of the opposite sex. In the contraception part, teaching is more factual, and some practical exercises are being performed, for example, putting condoms on bananas. The best approach according to the participants is adjusting the teaching method to the needs and the atmosphere of the class, paying attention to the group dynamics, and taking baby steps and then moving forward slowly. The teaching material is a challenge for the teachers. The course book is factually heavy and can only be used as a complement to teaching. Teachers are supposed to produce the teaching material themselves, often in collaboration with colleagues which is both times requiring and frustrating, since they need to look for the material and evaluate its validity of it themselves. More about the challenges concerning the teaching material comes under "challenges in teaching".

*"I need to use different methods to optimize the teaching for different groups..."*

*"...I divide students into groups of boys and girls and have them listen to the opposite sex..."*

*“...we repeat same topics, have working stations, group discussions, articles, stories and watch movies where they have to take a stand...”*

## **5.2 Sexuality education, a subject different from others**

There are some features and challenges in teaching sexuality due to the characteristics of the subject. Sexuality being such an important subject makes some demands on education. It is a living and evolving subject that needs to keep up to date which also according to the participants is a part of the challenges connected to teaching. There is a huge responsibility on teachers in fostering young people and helping them develop the right values while combating with lack of time for producing teaching material and reaching out to their students. Extern experts are not always the answer when developing school sexuality education and all participants had some interesting opinions on the intentions and the curriculum awareness of extern experts.

### **5.2.1 Importance of sexuality education**

All participants agreed on sexuality education is a very important school subject. Participants experienced that the huge amount of information flowing through different platforms and the easy access to the internet and electronic devices these days expose young people to sexual materials much earlier than before. Sexuality education in school gives all children a chance to the et right kind of information and critically evaluate all the material they access.

*“... kids today can easily access social media and therefore they have different kinds and levels of knowledge in sexuality education...”*

*“...they need to process the... huge inflow of material they access...and discuss their thoughts and sensitive topics...”*

Sexuality education in school is according to the interview participants the “real deal”, and it is teachers’ responsibility to share reliable information with students and give them evidence-based, source-critical knowledge, considering how easily they can assess sexual materials through modern technology. Through proper sexuality education, young

people are given tools to make aware choices when they interact with other people and get involved in relationships.

*“... teachers are responsible to give them the right kind of information, so they can make the right decisions in the future...”*

*“...we have to teach them to be source critical when they are searching for information on their phones, internet...”*

### **5.2.2 Characteristics of sexuality education**

Participants described sexuality as an evolving and living subject and as something that everyone benefits from during their whole life therefore it is a very important subject.

*“... sexuality education is an evolving subject and new topics come up every day...”*

*“... this is a very important subject ...and the knowledge is useful for their whole life...”*

All participants agreed on sex education should be delivered age appropriately and adjusted to children's level of maturity, development and needs. For best outcomes, sex education should start early in an easy manner and then build up gradually as children grow.

When is best to start sex education depends on, according to some of the participants, how to define sex education. Considering the amount of information flow and the earlier puberty, sexuality education should start earlier but that culmination of teaching and the focus of sexually related subjects should be during grades 7 to 9, and teachers believe sexuality should be waved into another school subject since it's a subject that affects all aspects of life. According to some of the participants, borders and body integrity is a part of sexuality education and therefore some topics should already start in preschool. According to others body integrity and touching are topics for different campaigns and can't be labelled as topics within sexuality education. It is important to teach in pre-school what is right and what is wrong, but according to some participants, you can't call it sexuality education.

*“...sexuality education should be age appropriated adjusted to their level of development ...”*

*"... Sexuality education should start early in an easy way and continue age appropriately ..."*

*"... I am not sure if you can call those slogans about body integrity as SE... maybe they are more as fostering campaigns".*

Teachers also mentioned that the goal of school sexuality education is not only learning factual knowledge and that the focus is mostly on attitudes, values, and emotions therefore sexuality education can be evaluated like other school subjects with the same criteria.

*"... assessment criteria for SE should be different from other subjects..."*

*"... the goal is not always to teach factual knowledge; sexuality is a subject about emotions and attitudes..."*

According to the participants sexuality education, specifically, the parts processing emotions and attitudes should start early in a playful manner, considering the amount of information flow and the earlier puberty, but that culmination of teaching and the focus on sexually related subjects should be during grades 7 to 9, and that sexuality should be waved into other school subjects because it's a subject that affects all aspects of life.

*"... sexuality education should start in grade 5...carefully and with baby steps and move slowly forward..."*

*"... the culmination of the teaching should be at grade 7-9, but the start should be much earlier..."*

Teachers I interviewed expressed a disparity between the inquiries on them and what they can contribute when it comes to sexuality education. They described it as that the importance and need for education are increasing, while there is very little time and material assigned for the area in the curriculum of elementary schools.

*"...when it comes to sexuality education there is no balance between the demands and the supplies..."*

*"... sexuality education is a very important subject, but we have too little time for both planning as well for teaching..."*

### 5.2.3 Challenges in teaching

In Finland as well as Åland, the teachers who are responsible for sexuality education in schools are health education or physical education, teachers. There seem to be differences in how many teaching duty hours teachers in the different subjects have. Teachers responsible for health education have a duty of teaching 23 hours per week, compared to for example mathematics or language teacher who teaches 18 hours per week. Teaching sexuality education is a time-requiring due to the characteristics of the subject. Sexuality education is such an evolving subject, there is a huge need for teachers to keep updated with the latest research, update their material to keep up with the evidence and produce enough material to be able to reach all their students. Teachers also need time to prepare the classroom environment for the subject, and they are not sure if decision-makers are aware of all the challenging characteristics of sexuality as a school subject.

*“... Sexuality education is a very important subject, but we have too little time for both planning as well for teaching...”*

*“... time is an issue...sexuality is not like other subjects...you can't just come into class and start teaching... I have to secure the environment so they can ask their questions...”*

*“... How can we get authorities to understand how important this subject is? We need to get our teaching duty hours reduced in favour of material production. At the same time, we need to increase the hours for sexuality education...”*

Also, the assessment of sexuality education is more time-requiring compared to other school subjects since sexuality education is not supposed to be factually dense according to teachers. Reviewing and giving feedback on home exams takes time, and regular exams like in other subjects are not the best way of assessing students' knowledge of sexuality education.

*“... we have home exams but it's more time-requiring than classic exams. I have to get them feedback and ask them for completion...”*

*“... this subject is not supposed to be theoretically heavy...”*

Another problematic aspect according to the participants is that there are very few sexuality education hours planned in the schedule and considering how societies are today and the number of subjects in need of being covered according to the curriculum, it is not



logical to expect that all topics are being properly covered with so little time marked for the subject overall. Some participants were even concerned about whether there are any noticeable effects of school sexuality education with so few hours of teaching for so many topics.

*“... due to time shortage try to put extra focus on sexuality in health education and engage it in other topics...”*

*“... how can they even get any effect of the education with so few hours for sexuality education...”*

LGBTI+ is the topic that all found challenging because there are no sustainable sources of information where teachers can both get inspired when producing teaching material and get more comfortable with the topic by being informed and feeling that they can master the area. Some of the interview persons mentioned that although they are aware of their hetero norms and try to be non-biased, they still can't help to be affected and act according to the hetero norms in their teaching. Teachers are tough aware of their attitudes and critically judge themselves.

*“... LGBTI+ is difficult and challenging for me...I am not sure ...of the words and expressions I use”.*

*“... I try to be non-biased... I am embedded in hetero norms and need to remind myself all the time...”*

#### **5.2.4 Extern experts**

According to the interview participants, extern experts, for example, local midwife associations may contribute to some kind of completion of sexuality education but including them in the teaching needs to be more controlled conditions. The intention of local experts is not always clear, they usually demand big amounts of money, and they wish the teachers to leave the classroom when they visit the groups. Teachers also ask themselves how these local experts assess themselves as better educators than the health education teachers who are specifically trained to teach sexuality education to young people and on what bases they assess school sexuality education as inadequate.

*“... not very clear on the intention of external experts. On what bases do they evaluate the level of knowledge of our students?”*

*“...the intention of local midwife association is not very clear...they charge a lot of money...”*

According to the teachers, the students are very comfortable with the school staff and have trust in them, in return teachers know how to approach young people naturally and comfortably. Local experts who only visit classes for a few hours can't build that trust with young people during their short visits in a sensitive subject such as sexuality, according to teachers. Teachers also refer to the curriculum as the governing document for schools and the educational sector, and whether extern experts consider them when planning their visits to schools. Some of the teachers told me that they have heard statements about them not being as good as some local experts when it comes to teaching sexuality education and they wished to know on what bases are there such thoughts.

*“... kids are comfortable with us, but I am not sure they would feel as comfortable with strangers in the classroom...”*

*“We know the curriculum and we know the students, strangers and those outside school environments don't know about our governing documents!”*

*“... What can these local experts do that we can't? They charge money and I feel like they think our teaching is not good enough. Is that based on evidence or rumours? Besides they are strangers to the kids...”*

All participants expressed some level of lack of knowledge in LGBTI+ related subjects but none of them was sure about local midwives' knowledge of these issues either. But if the extern experts consider themselves well-oriented in the LGBTI+ area, teachers were open to collaboration with them.

*“...my challenge in teaching is in LGBTI+ issues ...but I ask myself if the local midwives know these things better than I do?”*

*“... I am open to collaboration with local midwives... I guess they are experts in LGBTI+ which is a challenging area for me...”*

Local experts' contribution could be effective considering time and cost in case it was directly offered to the teachers in health education as workshops, according to some of the interview participants. They also see collaboration with extern experts as a complement to the teaching and not as a replacement, which is challenging considering the tight schedule and shortage of time for sexuality education.

*“It would be more time- and cost-effective if the external experts had workshops for teachers and gave us tips on how to develop our work...”*

*“... These local experts could give us supervision ... that’d be so much more effective...they are supposed to complete our teaching not to replace it...and is it worth it to lose hours to that?”*

### **5.3 Teachers’ needs**

Interview participants expressed a need for improvement both in their professional development and in their working situations. Some factors could improve the current sexuality education in schools and that requires time, information sources and sustainable teaching material that matches the requirements of the updated curriculum.

#### **5.3.1 Teachers’ working situation**

As mentioned under “challenges in teaching”, health education teachers have more working duty hours compared to teachers in some other subjects. This creates a working situation of lack of time for planning the material and lectures, as well as time for keeping updated with all the changes in sexuality which is an evolving subject. What teachers responsible for sexuality education need according to themselves is acknowledgement from school authorities, teachers’ union associations and decisionmaker. Teachers experience the expectations, and their working situation is not fare.

*“...the amount of teaching duty hours is not fair, because we have a very time requiring subject, which needs a lot of planning and updates. This is a living subject which evolves all the time...”*

*“... teachers’ union association should look over our working situation. The expectation of us is not logical, too much work and too little time. It is impossible to deliver what’s expected from us...”*

The importance of sexuality education might not be very clear for decision-makers and authorities, according to some of the interview participants, because if it was then there would be better organization around this school subject. All participants expressed a lack of time in their work considering both planning the lectures and the actual time reserved in the schedule for sexuality education. Teachers expressed that for sexuality education to be optimal there is a need to plan more hours for the subject within health education. Some

teachers even suggested an update of the curriculum for health education to benefit sexuality education.

*“... what I expect from authorities is to acknowledge the importance of this subject...we need time for collaboration and information exchange. We need time!”*

*“... I guess decision-makers don't even know the importance of school sexuality education... if they did ...I am sure our working situation would be different...”*

*“...more hours...should be...dedicated to sexuality education. Sexuality education is extremely important that those in decision-making positions need to realize this...”*

Some teachers mentioned that they only get to teach specific grades and therefore never get into some parts or topics of the curriculum. Interview responders prefer to follow their students all three years during 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grade to make sure that nothing is left behind and that same person is responsible to follow up the goals for the teaching.

*“... it is better to follow the students all 3 years...to make sure they have at least heard everything once...”*

*“...I don't even get to teach some parts in sexuality education...because I only teach one grade at a time”.*

For improving the quality of school sex education teachers suggested a collaboration platform where all health education teachers on the island can work together in both developing their knowledge and information updates such a platform would be the forum where material for teaching sexuality education according to the curriculum is being produced. Through this kind of collaboration, teachers can stay motivated, change experiences and work around the same frameworks. The quality of sexuality education could hence be assured no matter which school students are in, and for that, there is a need for structure and not only a curriculum. The collaboration platforms could also contain locally arranged training and workshops where teachers get to update their skills, exchange knowledge and all simultaneously take part in the latest evidence and research.

*“... teachers in health Education need a platform for collaboration and more time for planning and teaching to secure the quality of sexuality education...”*

*“...we need flexible bases but some kind of framework for the teaching, not only a curriculum...”*

*“... by locally arranged schoolings...where we exchange experiences... we could get updates in the subject and use the same material in all schools...”*

### **5.3.2 Improvement of sexuality education and teachers’ professional development**

All interview persons sound very positive about life-long learning and happily participate in schooling frequently, but the schoolings usually being offered are not fully responding to the need for information for the teachers and seldom improve or contribute to their existing knowledge. Teachers don’t find the content of available courses very useful for developing their work.

*“...it is not easy to find useful schoolings for teachers...not always evidence-based”.*

*“... what they teach in schoolings mostly we know it all already...”*

Professional development for some participants practically means advancing knowledge through their responsibility and interest in the subject, which means, reading, looking for information and schooling, networking, and collaborating with colleagues. Collaborating with colleagues was mentioned as a very important source of information exchange by all the interview participants. Teachers also use social media platforms to get familiar with what is available out there and what kind of material other educators and organisations recommend.

*“... most of my knowledge comes from my interest in the subject...”*

*“... Together with my colleagues, we look for courses that we find valuable for developing our work...”*

*“... I read a lot myself to increase my knowledge...Instagram is also a good source for information and courses...”*

As also mentioned before LGBTI+ is the area where all teachers expressed a need for more extensive schooling. The area is where most modifications and adjustments in the field of sexuality take place frequently, according to the interview participants and interview

participants enunciated their need for increasing their confidence when teaching the topic and keeping updated on your own seems almost impossible.

*“... I need more information about LGBTI+ and more schooling to understand everything...”*

*“... LGBTI+ is the area where most changes occur, we need more schooling focusing on that...”*

## **6 Analysis of the findings**

In this master’s thesis, I aimed to evaluate the educator’s level of knowledge and further the possible challenges they might face when teaching sexuality education, with the latest updated curriculum in consideration. The results were evoked into three main categories where I analysed sexuality education for grades 7-9 generally, the characteristics of the subjects as well teachers need considering their working situation as well their professional development.

### **6.1 School-based sexuality education in Åland**

By analysing interviews with 7 teachers in health education I concluded that all teachers are acquainted to the latest updated curriculum for health education for elementary schools in Åland. Some of the teachers had contributed to the design of the curriculum and some reported that they are familiar with the material but it’s not routine for them yet. The curriculum functions as guideline and governing document for education which makes it natural for all teachers to get familiar with it. According to BZgA (2010), central perspectives for sexuality education should be covered throughout a specific curriculum in quite some detail. A holistic approach in sexuality education covers a broad range of topics and is not limited to the prevention of consequences of sexual activity. Learners’ wishes and experiences should be considered, and the teaching should be delivered in an interactive exchange between the educator and the learner. The actual teaching is realized as before and the first year is more of an evaluation year of the new curriculum, where the teaching material according to the goals mentioned in the curriculum will be outlined. For high-quality sexuality education, the training of educators as well as the structural

framework of the curriculum is extremely important (Depauli & Plaute 2018). A nationwide survey on sexuality education in schools, performed by The Family federation Of Finland in 2006, showed that the level of sexual knowledge among young people is directly correlated to the level of school sexuality education. A clear national curriculum supports the improvement of standards for sexual health. During 1994-2004 there was no curriculum and therefore the distribution of sexuality education was of poor quality. The introduction of a national curriculum alongside specific teacher training resulted in improved teachers' attitudes around sexuality education classes, whereas many teachers considered it easy to talk about sexual matters. There is a need for political will to provide education and comprehensive health services to equip a new cohort of young people with sustainable knowledge about sexuality (Kontula & Meriläinen, 2007, Loeber et al. 2010).

Interview participants expressed that school is the optimal learning environment for sexuality education where young people can get neutral, evidence-based, and reliable information therefore teachers need to create a safe and fostering inclusive atmosphere in the classroom where the right kind of information is spread, and myths are dispelled. Research confirms that school is commonly reported as an important source for sexuality education and inadequate teaching in school may drive some young people to seek sexually related information in other ways including online sources and different non-reliable platforms. Schools should also prepare students to critically judge the huge inflow of material that they easily access from all different kinds of sources. A positive and holistic approach to sexuality education focused on well-being equips young people with knowledge and skills both in short term and later in life (Patterson et al. 2020). As described in Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe (BZga, 2010), students' sense of safety, their boundaries and respect for their privacy is an important requirement for sexuality education. Students should be encouraged to be open and take part in their learning, but personal experiences do not belong in the classroom and sharing such things could leave them vulnerable. By agreeing on rules together with the group an atmosphere of trust will be constructed and establishing sexuality education on gender responsiveness also provides the feeling of safety and trust for the students. Also, by involving parents through information about school sexuality education the supportive environment starts already at home (BZgA, 2010). For young people to build and maintain satisfactory and consensual relationships sexuality education should start long before they become sexually active.

(IPPF 2016a, IPPF 2008, Bonjour & van der Vlugt, 2018). According to Jarpe-Ratner's (2020) findings, students expressed that it is teachers' responsibility to create a safe classroom space where students feel safe and supported in their classroom. Mayeza and Louise (2019) write about sexuality education as a part of Life Orientation learning, to engage learners with knowledge and life skills in various fields of human development. Their research findings show that an optimal learning environment for sexuality education is a non-judgmental space where adolescents feel free to ask any questions about sexuality: They share views and experiences and relate to their teachers as adults in a much less authoritative way. Albert (2022) found that for teachers to create a unifying and democratic classroom culture and create teachable moments with a broad sense of health including the emotional, mental, social, and physical aspects of sexuality, more training, support and guidance are needed. To ensure safe spaces for all students, teachers need the expertise to present topics and navigate the challenges of a truly inclusive approach to sexuality education. Learners should feel free to ask questions and share their opinions without fear of being judged and teachers can encourage their students to relate to them as adults in a much less authoritative way.

## **6.2 Uniqueness of the subject**

All interview participants reflected on the characteristics of sexuality education. According to the teachers, sexuality can't have the same evaluation criteria as other school subjects. Sexuality is an important subject for all periods and aspects of life, and it needs updates. It is a subject about emotions and attitudes and should start early in a playful manner and then continue consistently and culminate in grades 7 to 9. The importance of school sexuality education was obvious to all teachers who participated in my interview. Referring to the huge inflow of information through different internet platforms and easy access to porn and sexual materials which leads to different levels of information among youths all teachers I interviewed consider sexuality education to be of huge importance. They all believed sexuality education should be taught and adjusted to the needs of the target group. Methods used for teaching are different depending on what group they are teaching. Classes are usually divided into groups of boys and girls. Some teachers claimed they are not always sure the method they use in teaching is the most suitable and that



there is no consistency teaching material. Teachers expressed their desire for collaborating for solid frameworks around sexuality education, but flexible teaching material is needed. The standards for sexuality education in Europe (BZgA, 2010) address communication as central for sexuality education because the information should be delivered in an appropriate language and the teacher should stimulate discussions between students which enables them to determine their standpoint and reflect on their values. By using different methods of teaching, different learners' preferences will be accommodated, and all senses will be addressed. Although the basics for sexual development are formed at home, the school has an important role in challenging norms and preparing students for puberty and the changes related to it. Education should lay ahead of different development phases before children reach them. A girl should know what menstruation is before she gets her first period (WHO & BZgA, 2010).

Through their accessibility concerning sexual material and content, the internet and social media are important platforms and important, sometimes even primary, sources of information and knowledge for young people. Without current and suitable sexuality education, children and adolescents will not develop skills of being source-critical, norther can they assess the accuracy and reliability of the content they access online (MacDougall et al., 2020). The practice of teaching sex education intersects with a myriad of complicated factors, causing their strategies to fall short. Many of these factors are structural problems. For example, teachers are pressed for time, feel uncomfortable, and have few weeks to cover the content. They teach in crowded and diverse classrooms that require care and emotional labour to fully approach these topics and support all students. Consequently, students can be left to make sense of things, such as facts, on their own (Albert, 2022).

The teaching methods and materials used by the interview persons were adjusted to the needs of the target group. Teachers use different methods depending on which class they teach and usually divide the class into boys and girls. They were not always sure about their teaching method being the most optimal method and they expressed a lack of consistency in teaching material. They desire solid frameworks for their teaching, but flexible teaching material is needed to respond to the goals and targets of the updated curriculum.

Studies show suitable teaching material in the development of which teachers themselves are involved, can prepare teachers, and make their work easier. When teachers take part

in developing educational materials their needs will be met. It is important to consider teachers' attitudes and reflections towards sexuality alongside their willingness to conduct lessons in sexuality education because they will serve as role models for their students (Depauli & Plaute, 2018). The research of Larsson & Rosén (2006) has been mentioned in the book of Ceder et al. (2022), where the results of the study conducted showed that heterosexuality is the norm being taught in schools through the existing teaching materials. In the same book, the research of Ohlander (2010) has been presented where 96,2 per cent of the material concerning human history is about the male population. In cases where females were mentioned, the characters were related to famous men and often in their roles as wives to well-known men.

Today there is awareness around the lack of representation of women, LGBTI+ and diversity in teaching material but what usually is being done to cover that shortage is that one chapter or section in the books' updated versions is dedicated to the subjects that earlier were excluded. The consequences of these attempts at inclusivity may sometimes contribute to the opposite effects of what was desired, namely amplification of exclusion instead of aiming to achieve inclusivity. (Ceder et al. 2022). Sexuality education is not a "one size fits all" kind of learning. Factors related to the learner: age, gender, social background, sexual orientation, development stage and individual capacity have great influence when designing education.

Sexuality education should be firmly based on universal human rights and pay attention to learners' different needs and backgrounds. Furthermore, sexuality education is not a single event but a lifelong process and has to be adjusted to the learners changing life situations. The teaching should interactively take place by using adequate language and appropriate terminology. The educator needs to enable meaningful communication between students and stimulate discussions. To address all senses and accommodate different students' preferences different teaching methods should be used in the classroom (BZga, 2010). The educator has to critically reflect on who is being included in and who is being excluded in the classroom, which means embracing a norm awareness approach. By being responsive to students' questions and reflections, educators can plan their teaching in an empowering

way where students' interests have been considered and by involving them in their learning the goals of education will be even more successful (Ceder et al., 2022).

Attributes of sexuality education in schools according to teachers I interviewed are also the specific challenges of this subject. All expressed time shortages and lack of time for the preparation of teaching material, lectures, and collaboration with other teachers. Compared to teachers in some other subjects, teachers in health education have more teaching duty hours per week, which make teachers believe that decision-makers are not aware of their work and responsibilities. Some also mentioned a mis-sync between sexuality education and other subjects. Preferably according to interview participants, is to follow the same students all three school years to maximize the chances that all students hear the same content and information at least once.

Although all teachers expressed confidence and genuine interest in teaching sexuality education all of them mentioned LGBTI+ issues as challenging, in terms of not always having confidence in how to express themselves in the class and not being able to string along with the continual development in the area. Some mentioned that they were driven by their hetero norms and regardless of their desire to be LGBTI+ inclusive, there are shortages in the knowledge possessed by the teachers.

To achieve inclusiveness, in the curriculum considering LGBTI+ we need to take an anti-oppressive approach in sexuality education which equally honours issues such as racial, and ethnic background, social status, education level, gender, mental and physical status and other forms of oppression. This kind of fully inclusive approach communicates a more fully integrated way forward and requires discussions on pleasure and that LGBTI+ identities are completely suppressed when reproduction is acknowledged as the only permitted purpose of sexual activity. Teachers need to create classroom cultures that are democratic and empowering and where teachers can model allyship and a comprehensive sense of health containing all aspects of sexuality (Jarpe- Ratner, 2020, WHO 2002, Elia & Eliason, 2010).

Participants of interviews described extern experts' inclusion in school sexuality education as an expensive solution where the intentions of some the experts were not clear. Neither

could teachers evaluate the level of knowledge of these so-called experts and their awareness of the curriculum was not clear. In general, teachers feel that students trust them more than they trust strangers, who visit their classes occasionally.

The most challenging part of the teaching was mentioned as LGBTI+ issues and teachers I interviewed were not sure that for example, the local midwife association would have more knowledge in that area. One major weakness in today's sexuality education is the absence of intersectional teaching which requires teachers to develop broad skills and knowledge in sexuality education. When these requirements get too demanding, the substantial involvement of NGOs and local experts in school-based work may be one solution.

Using different specialists from outside the school is an effective way of dealing with specific areas. These specialists may be doctors, midwives, NGO representatives, youth workers and so on (BZgA Federal Centre for Health Education, 2010). However, the outcome of the involvement of NGOs and extern experts may not always be effective cooperation with schools but fail to foster the necessary conditions for sexuality education (Rocha et al., 2016).

To optimize the teaching and effectively use the expertise of extern performers, the lectures given by extern experts should be seen as a complementary part of the school sexuality education and not a single event. The occasions should be planned together with the teachers to make sure that the requirements for school sexuality education and its curriculum are being met and that the knowledge being shared is uniform. Also, it is worth noticing that although some experts have deep knowledge in their specific areas of expertise, the content being taught to elementary school children should be adjusted to their level of development and the subject curriculum (Ceder et al., 2022).

### **6.3 Educators**

I asked the interview participants about their needs and their expectations from the authorities and decision-makers and many good ideas emerged which could improve school sexuality education by improving teachers' working situation and their professional

development. Participants mentioned collaboration platforms for all health education teachers on the island, fewer teaching duty hours and more time for preparation of teaching material as measures to improve their working situation which in turn would raise the quality of teaching. Teachers wish to participate in locally arranged, continuous training based on solid bases where they can express their need for specific schooling. Patterson et al. (2020), found aligns with earlier research conducted by Pound et al. (2016) and Fox et al. (2014), that the focus on sexuality education should be directed to positive healthy sexual development and well-being and that focusing on physical and emotional pleasure through a holistic and positive approach in sexuality education results in better outcomes for young people.

The purpose of school-based sexuality education should be to equip young people with knowledge and skill both in the short term and later in life. School-based sexuality education needs to empower young people in understanding and challenging gender norms, presumptions, and stereotypes. To maximize young people's engagement, integrating modern technology and online platforms in the delivery of sexuality education is recommended (Patterson et al. 2020). Well-established, standardised teaching practices of comprehensive sexuality education may be useful for teachers and educators in their work when educating children with the knowledge they need for safe relationships and future opportunities. Constructing a customized set of teachers' preparation may also confer merit to the teaching profession in the new techno-knowledge economy (Collier-Harris & Goldman, 2017).

When sexuality is taught in a context and by teachers who are comfortable and accepting in their approach toward teens' sexuality, young people's sexuality, attitudes, and beliefs will be shaped in a beneficial way which may increase their sexual self-efficacy and further their sexual satisfaction. Studies support prioritizing training for sexuality educators to support their comfort in teaching the subject and improve their competence in delivering sexuality education content (Nurgitz et al., 2021). Burns and Hendrik's study (2018), evaluating sexuality and relationship education training for Australian school teachers, describes teachers' training workshops as beneficial for professional development regardless of work experience and levels of confidence. Training should

consider the needs of the target group to address developmental changes, social norms and new technologies (Burns & Hendriks, 2018).

The challenges of getting things right lie more in the depth and skills in teaching than in the subject areas themselves. When teaching sexuality education, openness to the subject and motivation for teaching are important elements, but teachers need support and training. School authorities should not pressure those unwilling to teach to deliver sexuality education and instead offer support and stimulation to get involved. Good quality training and suitable teaching material in the development of which teachers themselves are involved, can prepare teachers, and make their work easier. When teachers take part in developing educational materials their needs will be met. It is important to consider teachers' attitudes and reflections towards sexuality alongside their willingness to conduct lessons in sexuality education, as they will serve as role models for their students (Depauli & Plaute, 2018).

For helping learners to feel free to express themselves by sharing experiences, and opinions and asking questions regarding sexuality, constructing non-judgemental classrooms is an important starting point. In such environments, educators can encourage learners to relate to them as adults in a much less authoritative way. Encouraging learners to raise their concerns about sexuality or other issues they might be faced with is a productive way for teachers to re-negotiate their current position as parental figures of formal authority over learners. Teachers' education and training are key measures to fostering social justice in the teaching of life-orientated sexuality education. There is a need for teacher education programmes to provide life orientation teachers with competence and knowledge on how to perform sexuality education classes in ways that do not promote heteronormativity, the gendering of abstinence and the silencing of girls' perspectives (Mayeza & Vincent 2019). In teaching sexuality education, key factors for fostering social justice and equality are teachers' training and education. Teachers' education in the future needs to take into the concern to equip teachers with cross-curricular knowledge and skills that will meet the needs of an evolving subject where development is happening continuously. Teachers as key players in the provision of school-based sexuality education need to get empowered in

their professional development and policymakers need to give more attention to young people's overall development (Mayeza & Vincent, 2019).

## **7 Conclusion**

The findings of this master's thesis conclude that sexuality education is an important school subject and that educators in charge of teaching the subject have a good base of knowledge, awareness of the updated curriculum and satisfactory competence in teaching sexuality. What teachers find challenging is keeping pace with all the updates within the subject, specifically the LGBTI+ area, preparation of teaching material and time shortage to cover all the topics within the curriculum. The teachers' opinion about the importance of sexuality education and teaching methods coincides with the theoretical background based on standards of sexuality education in Europe (BZgA, 2010) and the content of the book by Ceder et al. (2022), describing today's sexuality education in schools.

For teaching this evolving, important and lifelong needing subject detailed curriculum where all aspects of sexuality are being taken into consideration is required. The uniqueness of sexuality education needs to be acknowledged by those in decision-making positions. This is essential for teachers' working situation as them being responsible experts for the teaching of this important subject. Sexuality education is important not only because of the characteristics of this life-involving subject but taking the updated legislation (Finnish Ministry of Justice 2019 & 2023) into consideration, young people need to get informed about their rights and even more important their legal duties. With the new adjustments of the criminal law, young people must have the necessary knowledge about how their actions might end up acting illegal if they are not aware of the legislation. For achieving the objectives of the curriculum for sexuality education there is a need for acknowledging the importance of the subject by decision makers and school authorities. Educators need adequate time, teaching material, schooling, and opportunities to impact their working situation for being able to teach comprehensive, fair, and inclusive sexuality education, based on human rights and evidence following the requirements of the updated curriculum.

## **8 Ethical Considerations and validity of the study**

For the ethical evaluation of this master's thesis, I followed the instruction of The Finnish Research Ethical Delegation (TENK), published in 2009, updated in 2019. For this study, as I mentioned in the methodology section, I initially contacted the principals of all second-grade elementary schools with no progress. After discussing with my teacher, I contacted one teacher privately and used the snowball effect to get in touch with as many teachers as possible, which means one contact led to the next one. I emailed my aim for the study and my interview questions briefly to all those teachers who accepted to consider participation in my study.

Eventually 7 of 8 teachers consented to take part in my interviews. Ethical principles for all research fields contain respect for human integrity and freedom of self-determination. In accordance with regulations about not causing serious harm or injury to individuals, societies or other examination objects, all interview persons were participating anonymously, and their integrity was paid attention to. In my description of the research process as well as the analysis report I have not referred to the sex of the participants, or the name of the schools and I have consciously avoided disclosing precisely which subjects participants teach or where and when they graduated. The interviews were semi-structured which gave participants space to talk freely, and the transcription of the interviews was of course interpreted through my objective point of view even if I very carefully tried to connect the material to the theory and previous research.

According to Jacobsen (2007) validity in research is about accuracy perception of the results of the study. The results of this study have been compared to both the theoretical background as well the previous research in the same field. The interview participants were all teachers in health education and responsible for school sexuality education. They all have comparable educational backgrounds and level of competence, were all interviewed at their workplace under same circumstances considering time of the day and the environment where interviews were performed. All participants had been informed about the content of the interviews in advance.



All interviews were recorded, and they were all transcribed directly after each interview. During the process of categorizing, I checked my ideas for coding with my supervisor as well with my contact person at the government office. Even if I had named my categories in different way or coded the transcriptions with other words the outcome of the results would still have been the same. Of course, my interpretation of interviews and my understanding of the transcriptions and choice of citations can't be fully objective but during the whole process of this study and specifically if the methodology part I have openly shared detailed description of process of data collection and analysis. When choosing citations, I have read through each theme repeatedly to make the text fully inclusive and descriptive for each theme and tried to choose citation that best represent each theme (Jacobsen, 2007).

## **9 Discussion**

In this master's thesis, I aimed to chart the competence of teachers responsible for sexuality education in grades 7-9 om Åland. The study was conducted to figure out how well the latest updated curriculum for the subject was integrated into the teaching. 7 teachers were interviewed and all, but one was subject teachers in health education with sexuality being a part of their basic education during the subject teacher's studies. One teacher was not originally educated as a health education teacher but had passed some training that made them certified to teach sexuality education. Generally, all teachers expressed interest in teaching the subject. However, lack of up-to-date knowledge in specific parts of sexuality education, particularly in the LGBTI+ area, lack of time for preparation of teaching material and collaboration and too many teaching duty hours but few planned lectures for covering all parts of the curriculum were mentioned as the challenges of today's sexuality education by all teachers.

Attitudes towards sexuality have changed. Migration, media and technology, problems linked to STIs, and HIV urges for offering timely, up-to-date, and comprehensive sexuality education in schools. Both parents and teachers identify topics such as the human body, hygiene, and responsibility as important in sexuality education. Gender norms and human

rights are in focus for the shift of paradigm in sexuality education, which creates demands on tools to help educators in developing the curriculum of sexuality education with critical teaching methods. The shift is taking place in a globally diverse world both geographically and culturally and teacher preparedness is a key remaining challenge. The teacher may be assigned to care for the sexuality education but lack the necessary knowledge, skills or attitudes needed for the purpose (Rogow et al., 2013).

As mentioned in Haberland's and Rogow's study (2015), adequate teacher training is required to acquire curriculums and education goals for sexuality education.

Teachers would like the topics to be offered age properly and continuously step-by-step without information overload, preventing children and young people from having little or no sexuality education. Suitable teaching material on concrete and practical topics makes teachers feel confident, providing them with reliable support in sensitive teaching situations in the classroom. To build trust parents, need to be convinced that teachers are qualified to offer sexuality education. Teacher education programmes need to pay attention to the level at which the future teachers will be teaching sexuality education. How teachers talk about different sexuality topics differs with the age of the learners. Besides motivation and openness to the subject of sexuality education teachers need training and support. Believing firmly in the principles of sexuality education implies that school authorities should not pressurise unwilling teachers to deliver sexuality education, instead stimulate and support the teachers to make their tasks easier.

To ensure that teachers' needs are met, teachers should be involved in the development of the teaching material. Also, teachers' attitudes towards sexuality and their willingness to reflect on their attitudes and society's values and norms are important prerequisites for success when serving as role models for students. To unite ethical aspects with their values and consequently become competent as educators in sexuality education, teachers need support and adequate management both in school and beyond (Depauli & Plaute 2018). As of January first, 2023, the comprehensive reform of legislation of sexual offences (section 20, penal law), the definition of sexual assault may even involve the spread of pictures, text communication or other actions violating personal integration. The schools as fostering platforms bear a huge responsibility in educating young people about their rights, duties,

and boundaries. Children and adolescents need to know about situations that may make them criminally liable.

The competencies of educators are the very heart of sexuality education. Educators do not need to be high-level professionals, but they should ideally be trained to deliver proper knowledge. The absence of trained educators may not be used as an excuse for not delivering sexuality education, but preferably should sexuality education be introduced while still training to become a teacher. Educators need training both for openness to the subject and firmly believing in the fundamentals of sexuality education as well for maintaining a high level of motivation to teach. Authorities should not force anyone to teach sexuality education, instead, they need to stimulate and support teachers in their work as educators. Based on human rights and with the ascendance for diversities, educators should present facts and help learners to develop appropriate attitudes and skills for self-reflection, problem-solving, communication and negotiation (WHO, 2016).

For good quality, comprehensive sexuality education teachers' education must be considered, and elementary school teachers need to be properly prepared for their roles as educators and authorities need to recognize teachers' professional development as necessary (Collier-Harris & Goldman, 2017). Although school is the key factor for most high-quality sexuality education, how sexuality education is delivered is even more important than the material and curriculum itself. Teachers' knowledge and comfort level are essential when improving the delivery of sex education is the goal (Nurgitz et al., 2021). The teachers' ability to embrace more democratic and empowering relationships is essential for a successful implementation of a non-judgemental and non-authoritative approach to sexuality education. Teachers' training is the key factor for the promotion of social justice and equality when teaching about sexuality. Therefore, should teachers' education programmes equip those who will teach sexuality education with skills and knowledge on how to perform sexuality education classes where heteronormativity is not being promoted, girls' perspectives are not silenced and the gendering of abstinence is not pushed for (Nurgitz et al., 2021).

There is a need for securing the quality of school sexuality education not only by comprehensive teaching based on human rights but also to make sure that there is enough time for planning the teaching material, and teaching hours to cover all the important parts of the curriculum adequately. The stress of keeping the knowledge and the teaching material of this evolving subject up to date should not only be the teachers' issue but authorities and decision-makers need to acknowledge the great effort teachers in health education are doing in fostering young people and giving them attitudes and values that will build our societies through equity, respect and affirmation of every human's right and equal values.

## References

- Ahrne, G., & Svensson, P. (2022). *Handbok i kvalitativa metoder* (Upplaga 3.). Liber AB.
- Albert, K. (2022). "All I do is present what is given to us as the facts": Progressive sex education and the reproduction of inequality in public school classrooms. *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 31(1), 103–116. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.novia.fi/10.3138/cjhs.2021-0051>
- Augustinsson, S., Höglund-Nielsen, B., & Granskär, M. (2017). *Tillämpad kvalitativ forskning inom hälso- och sjukvård* (Upplaga 3:1.). Studentlitteratur AB.
- Barker, G. (2011). International Sexuality and HIV Curriculum Working Group, Nicole Haberland and Deborah Rogow (editors): It's All One Curriculum: Guidelines and Activities for a Unified Approach to Sexuality, Gender, HIV, and Human Rights Education. *Studies in Family Planning*, 42(3), 235-236. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4465.2011.00286.x>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Ceder, S., Gunnarsson, K., Planting-Bergloo, S., Öhman L. & Arvola Orlander, A. (2021). *Sexualitet och relationer: att möta ett engagerande och föränderligt kunskapsområde i skolan* (1st edition). Studentlitteratur AB.
- Collier-Harris, C. A., & Goldman, J. D. G. (2017). Could Australia have its own teacher professional standards for teaching relationships and sexuality education? *Sex education*, 17(5), 512-528. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2017.1313159>
- Depauli, C., & Plaute, W. (2018). Parents' and teachers' attitudes, objections and expectations towards sexuality education in primary schools in Austria. *Sex education*, 18(5), 511-526. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2018.1433650>
- Fejes, A., & Thornberg, R. (2019). *Handbok i kvalitativ analys* (Upplaga 3.). Liber AB.
- Haberland, N., and Rogow, D. (2015). Sexuality Education: Emerging Trends in Evidence and Practice. *Journal of Adolescent health*, 56(1). doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2014.08.013

- IPPF.2008. *Sexual Rights: An IPPF declaration*, London.
- IPPF.2011. *Keys to youth-friendly services: Adopting a sex positive approach*, London.
- IPPF. 2016a. *Everyone's right to know: delivering comprehensive sexuality education for all young people*, London.
- IPPF. 2017. *Deliver and enable, toolkit: scaling up comprehensive sexuality education*, London.
- Janssens, A., Blake, S., Allwood, M., Ewing, J., & Barlow, A. (2020). Exploring the content and delivery of relationship skills education programmes for adolescents: a systematic review. *Sex Education*, 20(5), 494–516. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.novia.fi/10.1080/14681811.2019.1697661>
- Jacobsen, D.I. (2007). *Förståelse, beskrivning och förklaring: introduktion till samhällsvetenskaplig metod för hälsovård och socialt arbete*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Kontula, O., (2014). Challenges and Progress in Holistic Sexuality Education of Teenagers in Finland. *Sex education*, Chapter 5, pp 93-130. [\(1\) \(PDF\) Challenges and progress in the holistic sexuality education of teenagers in Finland \(researchgate.net\)](#)
- Kontula, O., Meriläinen, H., (2007). *Koulun Seksuaalikasvatus 2000-luvun Suomessa*. (Katsauksia E 26/2007). Väestöliito. [7c755e1a-koulun-seksuaalikasvatus-2000-luvun-suomessa.pdf \(vaestoliitto.fi\)](#)
- Kontula, O., (1997). *Sexuality Education at the Upper Stage of the Comprehensive School in the School Year 1995-1996*. Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden tutkimuskeskus 1997:3. Helsinki: Edita.
- Landskapslag om barnomsorg och grundskola* (2020:32). Utbildnings- och Kulturavdelningen. [Landskapslag \(2020:32\) om barnomsorg och grundskola | Ålands landskapsregering \(regeringen.ax\)](#)
- Loeber, O., Reuter, S., Apter, D., van der Doef, S., Lazdane, G., & Pinter, B. (2010). Aspects of sexuality education in Europe - definitions, differences and developments. *The European journal of contraception & reproductive health care*, 15(3), 169-176. <https://doi.org/10.3109/13625181003797280>

Mayeza, E., & Vincent, L. (2019). Learners' perspectives on Life Orientation sexuality education in South Africa. *Sex education, 19*(4), 472-485.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2018.1560253>

Merrick, J. & Greydanus, D., E. (2016). *Sexuality: Some International Aspects*. Nova Science Publishers. New York.

Nurgitz, R., Pacheco, R. A., Senn, C. Y., & Hobden, K. L. (2021). The impact of sexual education and socialization on sexual satisfaction, attitudes, and self-efficacy. *The Canadian journal of human sexuality, 30*(2), 265-277. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cjhs.2021-0028>

Patterson, S., McDaid, L., Hunt, K., Hilton, S., Flowers, P., McMillan, L., Milne, D., & Lorimer, K. (2020). How men and women learn about sex: multi-generational perspectives on insufficient preparedness and prevailing gender norms in Scotland. *Sex Education, 20*(4), 441–456. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.novia.fi/10.1080/14681811.2019.1683534>

Polit, D. F., & Beck, C. T. (2010). *Essentials of nursing research: Appraising evidence for nursing practice* (7. ed.). Wolters Kluwer Health/Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

Rogow, D., Haberland, N., Del Valle, A., Lee, N., Osakue, G., Sa, Z., & Skaer, M. (2013). Integrating gender and rights into sexuality education: Field reports on using It's All One. *Reproductive health matters, 21*(41), 154-166. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0968-8080\(13\)41699-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0968-8080(13)41699-3)

*Strafflag* (20 kap 8.7.2022/723). Finlex. Hämtad (31.01.2023) från : [Strafflag 39/1889 - Uppdaterad lagstiftning - FINLEX®](https://www.finlex.fi/sv/strafflag/39/1889)

*Total reform av 20. kap i strafflagen* (OM007:00/2019). Justitieministeriet. Hämtad (31.01.2023) från: <https://oikeusministerio.fi/sv/projekt?tunnus=OM007:00/2019>

United Nations Population Fund. (2022). *Sexual and Reproductive Health*. UNFPA. Retrieved online on (28.11.2022) from: [Sexual & reproductive health \(unfpa.org\)](https://www.unfpa.org)

Jarpe-Ratner, E. (2020). How can we make LGBTQ+-inclusive sex education programmes truly inclusive? A case study of Chicago Public Schools' policy and curriculum. *Sex education*, 20(3), 283-299. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2019.1650335>

WHO Collaborating Centre for Sexual and Reproductive Health. (2018). Sexuality Education in the WHO European Region, Finland. Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA). Retrieved online (on 28.11.2022) from [Sexuality Education in the WHO European Region. Fact sheet of the status of sexuality education in Finland \(bzga-whocc.de\)](#)

World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe and BZgA. (2010). *Standards for Sexuality education in Europe, A framework for policymakers, educational and health authorities and specialists*. (BZgA, 1.1.9.10). Retrieved online on (28.11.2022) from: [DocHdl1OnPRS1tmpTarget \(bzga-whocc.de\)](#)

Ålands Landskapsregering. (2020). Läroplan för grundskolan på Åland. ÅLR2020/9841 271 U2. Retrieved online on (28.11.2022) from: [ÄMNESDEL \(laroplan.ax\)](#)



## Appendix 1.

1. Curriculum	2. Teachers' professional development	3. Characteristics of SE	4. Importance of school SE	5. Challenges in teaching	6. Learning environment	7. External experts	8. Teaching material and methods	9. Working situation
Aquainted to curriculum, teachers contributed to the material and familiar but it's not routine yet. Curriculum as guideline and governing document, teaching as before, first year is evaluation year	basic training on solid bases but continuous training not always according to teachers' needs, they know what they need but can't always find appropriate schoolings	can't be taught or evaluated like other subjects, evolving and living subject, needs updates, extremely important for whole life, about attitudes and emotions, should start early in a playful way and then continue consistently with culmination in 7-9 grade	Huge information flow, youth's easy access to sexual materials, porn, different levels of knowledge	Lack of time for teaching and material prep, heavy workload comparing to those other subject, HBTQIA+, group dynamics, the attitudes of decision makers, little possibilities for collaboration, mis sync with other school subject, teachers can't always follow students all 3 years, group dynamics	school is appropriate environment, neutral, reliable information, evidence based, safe environment, teachers' responsibility to create the safe environment in the classroom and foster students, spread right information and wake awareness about myths.	expensive, intention not clear, level of knowledge and awareness of curriculum not clear, kids trust their teachers	adjusted to the needs of the group, use different methods depended to the target group, usually divide boys and girls, not always sure about the method, no consistence material. Solid framework but flexible teaching material needed.	Expectations on decision makers: collaboration platforms for communication and material production, joint locally organized schoolings, improved work situation for teachers with fewer weekly teaching duty hours, more time for preparation and more hours for SE to cover the whole subject
Teaching strategies haven't changed with the new curriculum	I read a lot myself to increase my knowledge. IG is also a good source for information	Assessment criteria for SE should be different from other subjects	SE is an extremely important subject	Why is this extremely important subject being taught only once a week	It is teachers' duty to make students aware of myths, talk to them about the flow of	Not very clear about the intention of external experts. On what bases do they	I have different ways of judging their level of knowledge, because of their different	Teachers in health Education need a platform for collaboration and more time for planning and teaching

	and courses.				information and help them with their stress around sexuality	evaluate the level of knowledge of our students?	personalities.	to secure the quality of SE
This first year is evaluation year, not much has changed	Together with my colleagues we look for courses that we find valuable for developing our work	The goal is not always to teach factual knowledge, sexuality is a subject about emotions and attitudes	Many platforms available today and young people are exposed to so much material	We try to put extra focus on sexuality in health education and engage it in other topics	I feel comfortable with the teaching, and I should feel comfortable because I don't want to spread discomfort among my students	Kids are comfortable with us, but I am not sure they would feel as comfortable with strangers	Group dynamics and hierarchy within different classes have an impact on how we get the discussions rolling	
There are differences between schools therefore same basics are as before	I need more information about HBTQIA+ and more schooling to understand everything	When it comes to SE there is no balance between the demands and the supplies	This is a very important subject and the knowledge is useful for their whole life	The way societies are today we need to keep updated with all kinds of topics to be able to teach SE	I write up all the bad words on the white board to ease up the atmosphere	Why do external experts believe they can teach better than we do?	I need to use different methods to optimize the teaching for different groups	Teachers' union association should look over our working situation. The expectation on us is not logical, too much work and too little time. It is impossible to deliver what's expected from us
I am well aware of the material of the curriculum	I try to update myself and also get information from different communities	The responsibility of fostering is outsourced to schools, but should start at home	Sexuality education should be based on realism, critical thinking, reliable informing sources	We need more hours for SE to cover all the subject, prepare and work with our own values	It is the responsibility of adults to make the classroom situation comfortable	It would be more time and cost effective if the external experts had workshops for teachers and gave us tips on how developing our work	Majority is heterosexual so I can't put all my focus on HBTQIA+	We need training organized by local government, the kind of training that gives us tools to reach the goals of the curriculum

Discussing the material with colleagues	I have a solid base from teachers' education, but I need to update myself constantly	The subject has an increasing importance	Young people prefer not to talk to their parents about sexuality	More time is required to cover this important subject	Teacher's attitude is very important in the classroom	We know the curriculum and we know the students, strangers and those outside school environments don't!	Before we could collaborate with school nurses, but they are not a part of the school crew anymore	The books are not covering enough so we need to produce the material ourselves through collaboration with other HE teachers.
The curriculum is the governing document for our work	It is not easy to find useful schoolings for teachers	Sexuality education should be age appropriated adjusted to their development level	They know a lot and they know bad words, but they don't know the meaning of them	How can they even get any effect of the education with so little time	It is sometimes difficult to express yourself in a correct way	External experts don't know about our governing documents and are not familiar with our curriculum	I divide students in groups of boys and girls and have them listen to the opposite sex	We need a common plan for teaching even if we have different performances and teaching methods. a fixed framework that responds to the updated curriculum
Teachers contributed to the material for the curriculum	We have a good collaboration with colleagues, in finding and updating our teaching material	In different ages they have different needs	What is ok and what is not. When and how to say no. Assault is a concrete problem	We have the responsibility to work against the huge inflow of information	Kids don't always know the meaning of all the words they use	The intention of local midwife association is not very clear, but they charge a lot of money	They have biological differences so it's good to divide them in groups	It is easy to get stocked in your routines, therefore we need more collaboration to update ourselves and inspire each other
Material is no routine; I have to go back and check on it	What they teach in schoolings mostly we know it all already	It should start early, already at home	So many important subjects are covered in school sexuality education	HBTQIA+ is difficult and challenging for me		We know the curriculum, but externs don't. And we know our students best and we know how to approach them	External youth supporter groups (NGO), have lectures about consent and porn	Distance schooling are not very effective in SE. Better to arrange real classes for all of us teachers locally
Very well familiar with the material	It is healthy to listen to others and get new	The sooner SE starts the better outcomes	We have to ensure that they get correct	I try to be non-biased, but I know I	We need to pay attention to their	Extern experts require money	Discussions is the best method when	We need to get better in asking for resources, it

	perspectives		information	am affected by hetero norms	different levels of maturity and adjust the teaching	and want us teachers out of the classroom	teaching SE	is actually our responsibility to avoid to get stocked in old fashioned knowledge
In the new curriculum teaching goals are not clear, assessment criteria are wage	I mostly look for the information myself	Sexuality education should start early in a easy way and continue age appropriately	We have to teach them to be source critical when they are searching for information of their phones, internet	I am not sure which words are ok to use when it comes to HBTQIA+	I play down the tension and use loaded words frequently to create a natural teaching environment	Kids trust us, but these local so called experts are strangers, and they are not familiar with our curriculum and documents.	We repeat same topics, have working stations, group discussions, articles, stories and watch movies where they have to take a stand.	We teachers fix everything ourselves not to bother anyone
Curriculum is the guideline. Guidelines are essential for our work	Most of my knowledge come from my own interest in the subject	It is important to define sexuality to know when it should start	Teachers are responsible to give them the right kind of information, so they can make right decisions in the future	I am embedded in hetero norms and need to remind myself all the time	We agree on conditions before we start the lecture	These local experts could give us supervision instead, that'd be so much more effective. They are supposed to complete our teaching not replace it, and is it really worth it to lose ours to that?	I divide them first I small groups, then engage the whole class in the discussion	If I was to ask for training it would be something about HBTQIA+ and changings societies
I am acquainted with the curriculum, but I don't have detailed knowledge	We need to know more about values and plan our work based on evidence	They reach puberty and are exposed to all kinds of information much earlier than we want to realize	They are exposed to all kind of information.	Challenge is in how to deal with different groups and different individuals and groups within the groups	I feel like I am a living encyclopedia	I am not sure if these so called external experts know things better than I do. Besides they are	We have practical exercises to learn about contraceptives.	The amount of teaching duty hours is not fare, because we have a very time requiring subject, which needs a lot of planning

						unaware of our curriculum. On what bases are they going to teach our classes? How do they know that our students lack knowledge? Is it just assumptions or have they taken part of some evidence? I want to know what they can contribute to the teaching before I let them in to my classroom. Besides they need to come here free of costs.		and updates. This is a living subject which evolves all the time
Teachers shared their opinions when the curriculum was made	The content of schoolings is not always useful, or evidence based	Sexuality education should mostly focus on relationships and emotions	Flow and amount of information is huge	Time shortage is a huge challenge, and we need time to explain for the students that sexuality is not like in the movies and teach them how the reality looks like	We are not yet there were HBTQIA+ issues are fully natural: those with deviant orientation is may feel they are different but may not be able to put words on their feelings.	What can these local experts do that we can't? They charge money and I feel like they think our teaching is not good enough. Is that based on evidence	Collaborating with colleagues is important to plan the work	Maybe local experts could have workshops for teachers instead of meeting students for one hour for a lot of money

					It's the teacher's duty to make them feel safe to stand up for themselves	or rumours? Besides they are strangers to the kids		
It is good that the different parts of the curriculum are separately defined.	There is very little information about our own legislation, or it is difficult to find the information	The culmination of the teaching should be at grade 7-9, but the start should be much earlier	They need to process the material they see and discuss their thoughts and sensitive topics	Group dynamic is the challenging part for me as a teacher. I must deal differently with different groups.	Home climate is important too. SE starts in homes and goes hand in hand with schools SE. Home climate put in the values of the children	My challenge in teaching is in HBTQI+ issues but I ask myself if the local midwives know these things better than I do?	I take baby steps with the students and plan the class according to their needs and try to answer their questions	I would prefer to follow the same students for all 3 years so that I can make sure nothing is left behind and that they have got all parts of the curriculum
When you teach a specific grade, you might never get into some parts of the curriculum	I need to learn more about skills of channelizing the knowledge to my students	They mature much earlier and in some cases grade 5 is too late but in grades 7-9 we can cover the majority	School is an important fostering platform	In the groups there are norms, and you don't want them to dominate the opinions.	School environment is perfect for learning about sexuality	I am open to collaboration with local midwives, I guess they are experts in HBTQIA + which is a challenging area for me	I don't have a fixed framework and adjust the teaching according to the interest of target group	We need more workshops for teachers and more time to for planning and teaching SE
The goal is not to teach parts of the curriculum separately, so I don't focus much on them	I need to have more education in how to give students a language to speak about sensitive topics	SE should start in grade 5 in a playful manner, carefully and with baby steps and move slowly forward	Youths gasp for information and school is perfect place to share correct information	You need to use a language to communicate so that you can reach out to them all			I use PowerPoint, role plays, individual discussions and in pairs as teaching method	SE needs to get synchronized with other school subjects, like biology and society sciences.
Dividing topics as it is in the curriculum may lead to gaps in knowledge	I have a good theoretical base from my education, but SE is a	Kids are interested in the topic and stay focused	In school they get correct information in a neutral way	I use digital platform to communicate with those who dare not to			The book is very factually compact, and I use it more as a complement	We need a solid platform for SE to ensure the quality of the teaching.

in case they change school, but I understand that defining them is essential.	subject where frequent updating is essential			talk in the classroom			t in my teaching	For that solid base we need collaboration, continuity and communication
Due to shortage of time we have to make priorities	We know what we need more of, and schooling are not always responding to our needs	Issues such as attitudes and body integrity should start much earlier	School teaching is the real deal and reach many	As a teacher you need to be very determined to resist against some attitudes and in the classroom, there are individuals who get others to follow their ideas.			We don't have real exams, because this subject is not supposed to be theoretically heavy	We need more evidence based teaching material
I focus on the curriculum but teaching SE is not a monolog and you need to be able to improvise and be flexible	I need more tools in how to reach youths	It all depends on how we define SE, when it should start	Kids today can easily access social media and therefore they have different kinds and levels of knowledge in SE	It is challenging to approach them all and get everyone's attention. You need to build trust to reach them all.			We have home exams but it's more time requiring than classic exams. I have too get them feedback and ask them for complements.	We have no concrete and consistent teaching material to reach the goals for the curriculum
	We need time to be able to debrief and maintain the collaboration with our colleagues to ensure the quality	SE affects all aspects of life and should...be waved into other school subject	The access to sexual materials is so easy these days for young people	Some groups or individuals within groups are not easy to reach			I use powerpoint and practical assignments. We have discussions in pairs and in the group. But I am not sure if it's the right method	We need more planning time for SE. We need platform for exchange of knowledge and material production
	My basic training was	SE is an evolving subject and	Parents are not the best channel.	Time is an issue. It takes time			I adjust my teaching method to	By locally arranged schoolings

	adequate and had a high quality, but the subject is evolving everyday	new topics come up everyday	They might not have the ability to communicate these topics, neither have they the best knowledge.	to secure the environment, because SE is not like other subjects. I have to secure the environment so they can ask their questions			the group and use digital tools to reach them who dare not to speak. Digital tools are also useful for them to ask their questions later after the class	we could get updates in the subject and use the same material in all schools. We could have workshops and exchange experiences.
	I was educated in many different phases and I am still participating in short schoolings and trainings	It is important to give attention to students' different personalities and give everyone a fair chance to show their abilities	Society norms make it difficult to talk about sexuality in a natural way, therefore school has an important role in normalizing the talk	They watch porn and they have prejudices, and we need to discuss logics and it is very time requiring			I alternate theory with values. When I teach about contraceptives, I want them to learn by heart	We need communication platforms for all teachers in HE
	The SE part was a bit too short from the whole health education schooling	This subject is important, and they have use for it their whole lives. More attention needs to be paid by decisionmakers		I need to critically judge my own attitude and my hetero norms and my own thoughts around the subject			Discussions are the most productive approach but sometimes we need to have practical training, like how to put a condom on a banana	SE is somehow a novel subject and therefore we need communications platforms to sync the teaching and develop our work
	I participate in as many courses as I can but most of the time the courses sound better than they are.	This is an extremely important subject, and its importance is increasing all the time. Maybe the rapid development is a reason why decision makers don't understand		I am comfortable with the subject and my role as a teacher but I have a lack of knowledge in HBTQIA+ area.			We watch movies, clips, videos and then analyse what we have watched and discuss about different themes.	What I expect from authorities is to acknowledge the importance of this subject. We need more time for planning and material production.



		the importance of it					We need time for collaboration and information exchange. We need time!	
	The quality insurance of the courses is my own responsibility	How can we get authorities to understand how important this subject is? We need to get our teaching duty hours reduced in favour of material production. At the same time we need to increase the hours for SE		I am afraid that with my lack of knowledge about HBTQIA+ I'll say something that would offend someone.			I use flyers from NGO:s and divide them in groups of girls and boys	It is better to follow the students all 3 years, than teaching them only one year to make sure they have at least heard everything once
	By networking I have access to good sources of information	We need to keep updated all the time with the latest guidelines and recommendations and I am not sure authorities are aware of that.		SE is a very important subject, but we have to little time for both planning as well for teaching			We need flexible bases but some kind of framework for the teaching, not only a curriculum, but material too! That would secure the quality of the teaching and we all would have same level of knowledge	I guess decisionmakers don't even know the importance of school sexuality education, If they did I am sure our working situation would be different, at least somehow..
	It is hard to find relevant and appropriate courses for our needs.	We need to secure the quality of our teaching by having the same material		I need more time to prepare and get familiar with the teaching material				The curriculum for health education should be renewed and more hours dedicated

								to sexuality education. Sexuality education is extremely important that those in decision making positions need to realize this
		Sexuality is a personal subject, it can't be taught like other subject. This should be paid attention to when planning the curriculum		We have so many more teaching duty hours compared to some other teachers, which means we have to little time for our planning				HBTQIA+ is the area where most changes occur, we need more schoolings focusing on that
				We have so many students and very little time with them in this living and important subject				..I don't even get to teach some parts in sexuality education...I'd prefer to follow my students these last three years of elementary school...this would guarantee that nothing is left behind..."
				I feel like no one appreciates our work, Maby SE is not considered important				

				enough by authorities				
				The amount of teaching hours for HE teachers are the most compared to other teachers. Noone understands that we need to produce new material all the time and that the planning part of our work is huge.				
				There is a huge responsibility on us teachers and our responsibility is to teach and not spend a lot of time looking for the material				
				I am afraid that the consistency is jeopardized when kids change school if we don't use same frameworks in the teaching				
				Kids are on different levels of knowledge				

				in a class and it's a bit of a challenge				
--	--	--	--	---	--	--	--	--

## Appendix 2.

<b>Sexuality education of grade 7-9 on Åland: Curriculum, learning environment, Teaching material and methods</b>	<b>SE is a subject different from others: Characteristics of SE, Importance of school SE, Challenges in teaching, extern experts</b>	<b>Teachers' needs: Professional development, working situation</b>
Teaching strategies haven't changed with the new curriculum	Assessment criteria for SE should be different from other subjects	We need flexible bases but some kind of framework for the teaching, not only a curriculum, but material too! That would secure the quality of the teaching and we all would have same level of knowledge
This year is evaluation year, not much has changed	The goal is not always to teach factual knowledge, sexuality is a subject about emotions and attitudes	I read a lot myself to increase my knowledge. IG is also a good source for information and courses.
There are differences between different schools therefore same basics are as before	When it comes to SE there is no balance between the demands and the supplies	Together with my colleagues we look for courses that we find valuable for developing our work
I am well aware of the material of the curriculum	The responsibility of fostering is outsourced to schools, but should start at home	I need more information about HBTQIA+ and more schooling to understand everything
Discussing the material with colleagues	The subject has an increasing importance	I try to update myself and also get information from different communities
The curriculum is the governing document for our work	Sexuality education should be age appropriated adjusted to their development level	I have a solid base from teachers' education, but I need to update myself constantly
Teachers contributed to the material for the curriculum	at different ages they have different needs for knowledge	It is not easy to find useful schoolings for teachers
Material is no routine; I have to go back and check on it	It should start early, already at home	We have a good collaboration with colleagues, in finding and updating our teaching material
Very well familiar with the material	The sooner SE starts the better outcomes	What they teach in schoolings mostly we know it all already
In the new curriculum teaching goals are not clear, assessment criteria are wage	Sexuality education should start early in a easy way and continue age appropriately	It is healthy to listen to others and get new perspectives
Curriculum is the guideline. Guidelines are essential for our work	It is important to define sexuality to know when it should start	I mostly look for the information myself
Sexuality is a personal subject, it can't be taught like other subject. This should be paid attention to when planning the curriculum	They reach puberty and are exposed to all kinds of information much earlier than we want to realize	Most of my knowledge come from my own interest in the subject
I am acquainted with the curriculum, but I don't have detailed knowledge	Sexuality education should mostly focus on relationships and emotions	We need to know more about values and plan our work based on evidence

Teachers shared their opinions when the curriculum was made	The culmination of the teaching should be at grade 7-9, but the start should be much earlier	The content of schoolings is not always useful, or evidence based
It is good that the different parts of the curriculum are separately defined.	They mature much earlier and in some cases grade 5 is too late but in grades 7-9 we can cover the majority	There is very little information about our own legislation, or it is difficult to find the information
When you teach a specific grade, you might never get into some parts of the curriculum	SE should start in grade 5 in a playful manner, carefully and with baby steps and move slowly forward	I need to learn more about skills of channelizing the knowledge to my students
Better to follow the students all 3 years, than teaching them only one year.	Kids are interested in the topic and stay focused	I need to have more education in how to give students a language to speak about sensitive topics
The goal is not to teach parts of the curriculum separately, so I don't focus much on them	Issues such as attitudes and body integrity should start much earlier	I have a good theoretical base from my education, but SE is a subject where frequent updating is essential
Dividing topics as it is in the curriculum may lead to gaps in knowledge in case they change school, but I understand that defining them is essential.	It all depends on how we define SE, when it should start	We know what we need more of, and schooling are not always responding to our needs
Due to shortage of time we have to make priorities	SE should be waved into other school subject	I need more tools in how to reach youths
I focus on the curriculum but teaching SE is not a monolog	SE is an evolving subject and new topics come up everyday	We need time to be able to debrief and maintain the collaboration with our colleagues to ensure the quality
It is teachers' duty to make students aware of myths, talk to them about the flow of information and help them with their stress around sexuality	It is important to give attention to students' different personalities and give everyone a fair chance to show their abilities	My basic training was adequate and had a high quality, but the subject is evolving everyday
I feel comfortable with the teaching, and I should feel comfortable because I don't want to spread discomfort among my students	This subject is important, and they have use for it their whole lives. More attention needs to be paid by decisionmakers	I was educated in many different phases and I am still participating in short schoolings and trainings
I write up all the bad words on the white board to ease up the atmosphere	This is an extremely important subject, and its importance is increasing all the time. Maybe the rapid development is a reason why decision makers don't understand the importance of it	The SE part was a bit too short from the whole health education schooling
It is the responsibility of adults to make the classroom situation comfortable	How can we get authorities to understand how important this subject is? We need to get our teaching duty hours reduced in favour of material production. At the same time we need to increase the hours for SE	I participate in as many courses as I can but most of the time the courses sound better than they are.
Teacher's attitude is very important in the classroom	We need to keep updated all the time with the latest guidelines and recommendations and I am not sure authorities are aware of all challenges in this subject	The quality insurance of the courses is my own responsibility

It is sometimes difficult to express yourself in a correct way	We need to secure the quality of our teaching by having the same material	By networking I have access to good sources of information
Kids don't always know the meaning of all the words they use	Why is this extremely important subject being taught only once a week	It is hard to find relevant and appropriate courses for our needs.
Kids are on different levels of knowledge in a class and it's a bit of a challenge	Due to time shortage try to put extra focus on sexuality in health education and engage it in other topics	Teachers in health Education need a platform for collaboration and more time for planning and teaching to secure the quality of SE
We need to pay attention to their different levels of maturity and adjust the teaching	They way societies are today we need to keep updated with all kinds of topics to be able to teach SE	HBTQIA+ is the area where most changes occur, we need more schoolings focusing on that
I play down the tension and use loaded words frequently to create a natural teaching environment	We need more hours for SE to cover all the subject, prepare and work with our own values	Teachers' union association should look over our working situation. The expectation on us is not logical, too much work and too little time. It is impossible to deliver what's expected from us
We agree on conditions before we start the lecture	More time is required to cove this important subject	We need training organized by local government, the kind of training that gives us tools to reach the goals of the curriculum
I feel like I am a living encyclopaedia	How can they even get any effect of the education with so few hours for SE	The books are not covering enough so we need to produce the material ourselves through collaboration with other HE teachers.
We are not yet there were HBTQIA+ issues are fully natural: those with deviant orientations may feel they are different but may not be able to put words on their feelings. It's the teacher's duty to make them feel safe to stand up for themselves	We have the responsibility to work against the huge inflow of information	We need a common plan for teaching even if we have different performances and teaching methods
Home climate is important too. SE starts in homes and goes hand in hand with schools SE. Home climate put in the values of the children	HBTQIA+ is difficult and challenging for me	It is easy to get stocked in your routines, therefore we need more collaboration to update ourselves and inspire each other
I have different ways of judging their level of knowledge, because of their different personalities.	I try to be non-biased, but I know I am affected by hetero norms	Distance schooling are not very effective in SE. Better to arrange real classes for all of us teachers locally
Group dynamics and hierarchy within different classes have an impact on how we get the discussions rolling	I am not sure which words are ok to use when it comes to HBTQIA+	We need to get better in asking for resources, it is actually our responsibility to avoid to get stocked in old fashioned knowledge
I need to use different methods to optimize the teaching for different groups	I am embedded in hetero norms and need to remind myself all the time	We teachers fix everything ourselves not to bother anyone

Majority is heterosexual so I can't put all my focus on HBTQIA+	Challenge is in how to deal with different groups and different individuals and groups within the groups	If I was to ask for training it would be something about HBTQIA+ and changings societies
Before we could collaborate with school nurses, but they are not a part of the school crew anymore	Time shortage is a huge challenge, and we need time to explain for the students that sexuality is not like in the movies and teach them how the reality looks like	The amount of teaching duty hours is not fare, because we have a very time requiring subject, which needs a lot of planning and updates. This is a living subject which evolves all the time
I divide students in groups of boys and girls and have them listen to the opposite sex	Group dynamic is the challenging part for me as a teacher. I must deal differently with different groups.	Maybe local experts could have workshops for teachers instead of meeting students for one hour for a lot of money
They have biological differences so it's good to divide them in groups	In the groups there are norms, and you don't want them to dominate the opinions.	I would prefer to follow the same students for all 3 years so that I can make sure nothing is left behind and that they have got all parts of the curriculum
External youth supporter groups (NGO), have lectures about consent and porn	You need to use a language to communicate so that you can reach out to them all	We need more workshops for teachers and more time to for planning and teaching SE
Discussions is the best method when teaching SE	I use digital platform to communicate with those who dare not to talk in the classroom	SE needs to get synchronized with other school subjects, like biology and society sciences.
We repeat same topics, have working stations, group discussions, articles, stories and watch movies where they have to take a stand.	As a teacher you need to be very determined to resist against some attitudes and in the classroom, there are individuals who get others to follow their ideas.	We need a solid platform for SE to ensure the quality of the teaching. For that solid base we need collaboration, continuity and communication
I divide them first I small groups, then engage the whole class in the discussion	It is challenging to approach them all and get everyone's attention. You need to build trust to reach them all.	We need more evidence based teaching material
We have practical exercises to learn about contraceptives.	Some groups or individuals within groups are not easy to reach	We have no concrete and consistent teaching material to reach the goals for the curriculum
Collaborating with colleagues is important to plan the work	Time is an issue. It takes time to secure the environment, because SE is not like other subjects. You can't just come in to the class and start teaching. I have to secure the environment so they can ask their questions	We need more planning time for SE. We need platform for exchange of knowledge and material production
I take baby steps with the students and plan the class according to their needs and try to answer their questions	They watch porn and they have prejudices, and we need to discuss logics and it is very time requiring	By locally arranged schoolings we could get updates in the subject and use the same material in all schools. We could have workshops and exchange experiences.
I don't have a fixed framework and adjust the teaching according to the interest of target group	I need to critically judge my own attitude and my hetero norms and my own thoughts around the subject	We need communication platforms for all teachers in HE



I use PowerPoint, role plays, individual discussions and in pairs as teaching method	I am comfortable with the subject and my role as a teacher but I have a lack of knowledge in HBTQIA+ area.	SE is somehow a novel subject and therefore we need communications platforms to sync the teaching and develop our work
The book is very factually compact, and I use it more as a complement in my teaching	I am afraid that with my lack of knowledge about HBTQIA+ I'll say something that would offend someone.	What I expect from authorities is to acknowledge the importance of this subject. We need more time for planning and material production. We need time for collaboration and information exchange. We need time!
	SE is a very important subject, but we have to little time for both planning as well for teaching	I guess decisionmakers don't even know the importance of school sexuality education, If they did I am sure our working situation would be different, at least somehow..
	I need more time to prepare and get familiar with the teaching material	The curriculum for health education should be renewed and more hours dedicated to sexuality education. Sexuality education is extremely important that those in decision making positions need to realize this
I use powerpoint and practical assignments. We have discussions in pairs and in the group. But I am not sure if it's the right method	We have so many more teaching duty hours compared to some other teachers, which means we have to little time for our planning	..I don't even get to teach some parts in sexuality education...I'd prefer to follow my students these last three years of elementary school...this would guarantee that nothing is left behind..."
I adjust my teaching method to the group and use digital tools to reach them who dare not to speak. Digital tools are also useful for them to ask their questions later after the class	We have so many students and very little time with them in this living and important subject	
I alternate theory with values. When I teach about contraceptives, I want them to learn by heart	I feel like no one appreciates our work, Maby SE is not considered important enough by authorities	
Discussions are the most productive approach but sometimes we need to have practical training, like how to put a condom on a banana	The amount of teaching hours for HE teachers are the most compared to other teachers. Noone understands that we need to produce new material all the time and that the planning part of our work is huge.	
We watch movies, clips, videos and then analyse what we have watched and discuss about different themes.	There is a huge responsibility on us teachers and our responsibility is to teach and not spend a lot of time looking for the material	
I use flyers from NGO:s and divide them in groups of girls and boys	I am afraid that the consistency is jeopardized when kids change	

	school if we don't use same frameworks in the teaching	
We need flexible bases but some kind of framework for the teaching, not only a curriculum, but material too! That would secure the quality of the teaching and we all would have same level of knowledge	Not very clear about the intention of external experts. On what bases do they evaluate the level of knowledge of our students?	
To begin with I divide them in groups of boys and girls	Kids are comfortable with us, but I am not sure they would feel as comfortable with strangers	
I have different ways of judging their level of knowledge, because of their different personalities.	Why do external experts believe they can teach better than we do?	
Group dynamics and hierarchy within different classes have an impact on how we get the discussions rolling	It would be more time and cost effective if the external experts had workshops for teachers and gave us tips on how developing our work	
I need to use different methods to optimize the teaching for different groups	We know the curriculum and we know the students, strangers and those outside school environments don't!	
Majority is heterosexual so I can't put all my focus on HBTQIA+	External experts don't know about our governing documents and are not familiar with our curriculum	
Before we could collaborate with school nurses, but they are not a part of the school crew anymore	The intention of local midwife association is not very clear, but they charge a lot of money	
I divide students in groups of boys and girls and have them listen to the opposite sex	We know the curriculum, but externs don't. And we know our students best and we know how to approach them	
They have biological differences so it's good to divide them in groups	Extern experts require money and want us teachers out of the classroom	
External youth supporter groups (NGO), have lectures about consent and porn	Kids trust us, but these local so called experts are strangers, and they are not familiar with our curriculum and documents.	
Discussions is the best method when teaching SE	These local experts could give us supervision instead, that'd be so much more effective. They are supposed to complete our teaching not replace it, and is it really worth it to lose hours to that?	
We repeat same topics, have working stations, group discussions, articles, stories and watch movies where they have to take a stand.	I am not sure if these so called external experts know things better than I do. Besides they are unaware of our curriculum. On what bases are they going to teach our classes? How do they know that our students lack knowledge? Is it just assumptions or have they take part of some	

	evidence? I want to know what they can contribute to the teaching before I let them in to my classroom. Besides they need to come here free of costs.	
I divide them first I small groups, then engage the whole class in the discussion	What can these local experts do that we can't? They charge money and I feel like they think our teaching is not good enough. Is that based on evidence or rumours? Besides they are strangers to the kids	
We have practical exercises to learn about contraceptives.	My challenge in teaching is in HBTQI+ issues but I ask myself if the local midwives know these things better than I do?	
Collaborating with colleagues is important to plan the work	SE is an extremely important subject	
I take baby steps with the students and plan the class according to their needs and try to answer their questions	Many platforms available today and young people are exposed to so much material	
I don't have a fixed framework and adjust the teaching according to the interest of target group	Society norms make it difficult to talk about sexuality in a natural way, therefore school has an important role in normalizing the talk	
I use PowerPoint, role plays, individual discussions and in pairs as teaching method	Sexuality education should be based on realism, critical thinking, reliable informing sources	
The book is very factually compact, and I use it more as a complement in my teaching	Young people prefer not to talk to their parents about sexuality	
We don't have real exams, because this subject is not supposed to be theoretically heavy	They know a lot and they know bad words, but they don't know the meaning of them	
We have home exams but it's more time requiring than classic exams. I have to get them feedback and ask them for complements.	What is ok and what is not. When and how to say no. Assault is a concrete problem	
I use powerpoint and practical assignments. We have discussions in pairs and in the group. But I am not sure if it's the right method	So many important subjects are covered in school sexuality education	
I adjust my teaching method to the group and use digital tools to reach them who dare not to speak. Digital tools are also useful for them to ask their questions later after the class	We have to ensure that they get correct information	
I alternate theory with values. When I teach about contraceptives, I want them to learn by heart	We have to teach them to be source critical when they are searching for information of their phones, internet	

Discussions are the most productive approach but sometimes we need to have practical training, like how to put a condom on a banana	Teachers are responsible to give them the right kind of information, so they can make right decisions in the future	
We watch movies, clips, videos and then analyse what we have watched and discuss about different themes.	They are exposed to all kind of information.	
I use flyers from NGO:s and divide them in groups of girls and boys	Flow and amount of information is huge	
School environment is perfect for learning about sexuality	They need to process the material they see and discuss their thoughts and sensitive topics	
School is an important fostering platform	School teaching is the real deal and reach many	
Youths gasp for information and school is perfect place to share correct information	Kids today can easily access social media and therefore they have different kinds and levels of knowledge in SE	
In school they get correct information in a neutral way	The access to sexual materials is so easy these days for young people	
To begin with I divide them in groups of boys and girls	Parents are not the best channel. They might not have the ability to communicate these topics, neither have they the best knowledge.	
	This is a very important subject and the knowledge is useful for their whole life	
	We need to pay attention to their different levels of maturity and adjust the teaching	
	We don't have real exams, because this subject is not supposed to be theoretically heavy	
	We have home exams but it's more time requiring than classic exams. I have to get them feedback and ask them for complements.	
	I am open to collaboration with local midwives, I guess they are experts in HBTQIA+ which is a challenging area for me	