CHAPTER 9
Strategies for Dealing with Conflicting Schemas: Comprehending Individual Reasoning as Supported by the Cultural Template for Teaching Sexuality Education in Uganda

Intermezzo 2 and the previous three chapters discussed the findings of this study based on the main data collection which took place between September and December 2011. First, Intermezzo 2 and Chapter 6 described the role of values, discourses and cultural schemas. Whereas Intermezzo 2 described the discourses and values in Ugandan society in which teachers’ reasoning about teaching sexuality education is embedded, Chapter 6 discussed the ambivalence teachers may experience due to internal conflicts between their ‘traditional’ and ‘present’ cultural schemas of teaching sexuality education. Chapter 7 discussed how teachers’ sexuality education messages are situation-defined: teachers formulate their messages in interaction with their perceived professional identity, the perceived school setting and students’ perceived sexual citizenship. Consequently, Chapter 8 discussed how teachers reconstruct their personal experiences of sexual initiation to motivate the content of their sexuality education messages, and how their personal experiences may enable teachers to empathise with students’ well-being.

The present chapter aims to develop a deeper understanding and interpretation of these findings. This deeper understanding and interpretation is obtained by: (i) revisiting cultural schema theory, as described in Chapter 3; and (2) examining the reflections of the teachers who were re-interviewed during the validation study that took place in February 2013, as described in Chapter 4. Thus, this chapter comprehends and further interprets the findings described in this dissertation based on both theory and participants’ voices. As a result, the chapter builds on
Intermezzo 2 and the previous three chapters by:

- proposing a cultural template, including higher-level schemas that teachers rely on to support their reasoning for teaching sexuality education; and
- comprehending teachers’ individual reasoning as supported by this cultural template by suggesting two strategies that teachers adopt to deal with conflicting schemas.

The validation study, which is described in section 4.5 of Chapter 4, has resulted in two case studies of two teachers who were re-interviewed. Those case studies are presented in this chapter to support and explain the two strategies that teachers adopt to deal with conflicting schemas. The theory and methodology used for this study are described in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

The following section presents a cultural template, which interprets how teachers’ reasoning for teaching sexuality education is motivated by higher-level schemas and is situation-defined based on an interaction between teachers’ cultural schemas of professional identity, the school setting, and students and their sexual citizenship. The second section presents two case studies that illustrate two strategies that teachers apply to deal with conflicting schemas arising from this interaction: (1) compartmentalisation; and (2) choose one and reject the other.
9.1 Cultural Template for Teaching Sexuality Education in Uganda

In the present study, individual teachers’ reasoning about teaching sexuality education is framed by the larger cultural template for teaching sexuality education as shared by the Ugandan teachers in this study (Quinn, 2011). Figure 9 presents this cultural template, which is based on cultural schema theory, as described in Chapter 3 and visualised in Figure 4, and synthesises the findings described in Intermezzo 2 and Chapter 6 and 7.

9.1.1 Higher-level Schemas

The cultural template visualises the hierarchical way in which cultural schemas are causally connected, which enables schemas to act as goals that have motivational force (D’Andrade, 1992; Quinn, 2011). Visualisation of teachers’ cultural schemas for teaching sexuality education using this cultural template helped me return to the data and look for higher-level schemas, which interact with the lower- and middle-level schemas mentioned by the participants in Intermezzo 2 and Chapter 6 and 7 that motivate teachers to teach sexuality education.

The cultural template suggests that two higher-level schemas are important motivators for teachers’ reasoning to teach sexuality education: teachers’ own well-being (1) and their students’ well-being (2). To enhance their own well-being, teachers aim for: (1) financial security; and (2) being respected in society. In relation to teaching sexuality education, teachers are interpreted as also finding these two aspects important for their students’ well-being: (1) complete education and become financially independent; and (2) being respected in society. As elaborated below, these higher-level schemas show similarities to the goals formulated by Ormel et al. (1999), who argue that individuals ultimately aim for physical and social well-being through stimulation, comfort, affection, status and behavioural confirmation (see Chapter 3).

Teachers expressed the importance of education for their students’ future. As discussed in Chapter 5 and 7, both students and teachers often considered romantic and sexual relationships as interfering with school work, especially when they result in students becoming pregnant:

Because to young girl, when you get involved into sex, you’re still school-going, you need to fulfil your goal, you need to complete your education, and now you are pregnant, there is a way you become stuck and your goals are not meant to be achieved as expected.
(Female teacher, age 35)

The following teacher explained that he advises abstinence because students’ education is important to break ‘the cycle of poverty’. He relates this to enhancing not only individual but also societal well-being:
Of course, I emphasise on abstinence, [...] we have to emphasise, because when we do this, I’m sure we will have, eh, a better living population, hm? [...] There should be an end of suffering [...] the vicious cycle of poverty should stop [...] if they manage to go through the academic ladders, of course, they will be financially stable. [...] you’re in a position to survive, better than... someone who is not enlightened at all. (Male teacher, age 29)

Also, for the teachers themselves, having a job is a way to achieve comfort by being able to take care of themselves and their families, and it also helps them achieve status and behavioural confirmation by being respected in society.

Another goal pursued by teachers — both for themselves and for their students — is being respected in society. Both students and teachers could be respected in society for their 'morally upright' behaviour (see Intermezzo 2). For students, this could mean not being sexually active before marriage; for teachers, this could mean not 'encouraging' students to become sexually active by teaching sexuality education. Furthermore, respect could be gained by getting married, giving birth to children, and having a job:

Marriage is important. Marriage is the... apex of... of eh... maturity, of how society perceives you, respect in society, [...] You give respect to your family, you bring pride when you get married, the official way. It's very important in Uganda to get married. [...] for a woman to reach the age of thirty... without getting married... people will start complaining. Even your parents may start complaining. (Female teacher, age 28)

The teachers explained that, in the past, people could gain respect due to the number of children they had and that children were considered a future source of income. However, teachers indicated that, nowadays, society increasingly values children’s education. This means that teachers could aim to have fewer children to be able to offer each of them a good education.

Teachers may contribute to their own well-being through security, which can be achieved by maintaining their job and by having status and respect within society. Being able to contribute to their students’ well-being can contribute to teachers’ own well-being as well. For instance, a teacher may reason that teaching abstinence-only is morally right and will, therefore, contribute to the teacher being respected in society. Furthermore, a teacher may reason that teaching abstinence-only will help students abstain and will, therefore, contribute to students’ well-being, as society respects them for being a virgin. In such a case, a teacher will feel no ambivalence about these two higher-level schemas.

However, another teacher may reason that young people need accurate and complete information about contraception and that this will contribute to students’ well-being. In such a case, teaching contraception may be regarded as immoral by society, and the teacher may be afraid of being regarded as an immoral person. This teacher may feel ambivalence about these higher-level schemas of students’ well-being and their own well-being. This example of ambivalence relates to the other cases of ambivalence described in Chapter 6 and to the conflicts discussed later in this chapter.
9.1.2 Middle-level and Lower-level Schemas

The cultural schemas discussed in Intermezzo 2 and Chapter 6 and 7 are mostly lower-level and middle-level schemas. Teachers’ middle-level schemas comprise mainly beliefs about teachers’ professional identity, the school setting, and students and their sexual citizenship. As discussed in Chapter 7, these beliefs are situation-defined, which means that teachers will adapt the content of their sexuality education messages to the specific school setting and the type of students they are teaching. These schemas are also linked to other middle-level schemas, including values related to religion, fertility and morality and dominant discourses such as the ABC approach, childhood innocence and gender, as discussed in Intermezzo 2.

At the lower level, teachers’ reasoning for teaching sexuality education may be based on schemas that sexuality education is (not) the duty of a teacher and that sexuality education can help control students’ sexuality or protect students’ health. These are the schemas that teachers may easily mention in a conversation, while assuming that other teachers understand the middle- and higher-level schemas they are causally linked with.

These lower-level schemas may only generate motivational force, and be given meaning, in interaction with middle-level and higher-level schemas (D’Andrade in: H. F. Mathews, 1992). For instance, teachers may reason that students’ sexuality needs to be controlled (lower-level schema) because they feel that students are unable to make independent decisions (middle-level schema), which may result in students becoming pregnant or being caught having sex, which will interfere with students’ perceived need to be respected in society by being morally upright and to complete their education (higher-level schemas). At the same time, these schemas are linked to teachers’ professional identity, which instructs them to execute the school regulations that prohibit student sexual relationships (middle-level schemas), and to teachers’ own well-being by being respected in society for living up to their professional identity (higher-level schema).

9.1.3 Situation-defined Schemas

The cultural template shows how teachers’ reasoning for teaching sexuality education is situation-defined: the content of teachers’ sexuality education messages is directed by the interaction between teachers’ cultural schemas of professional identity (3), their cultural schemas of students and their sexual citizenship (4), and the secondary school setting with its specific regulations (5).
Figure 9. Visualisation of teachers’ cultural template for teaching school-based sexuality education in Uganda based on Quinn (2011)
9.2 Strategies for Dealing with Conflicting Schemas

The template reveals a potential conflict in teachers’ cultural schemas: teachers regard students both as sexually innocent and as sexually active (6). This conflict interacts with the type of sexuality education teachers feel that students should receive, because if teachers feel that students require accurate, comprehensive sexuality education to contribute to their sexual and reproductive well-being, this may conflict with their professional identity of teaching what is morally upright and of adhering to school regulations that prescribe abstinence-only education.

This section describes two case studies based on the reflections of two teachers who were re-interviewed in the validation study, during which the preliminary findings of the main data collection were discussed. The two case studies illustrate how the participants adopted two strategies to internalise their conflicting schemas arising in the interaction between their cultural schemas of professional identity, students and their sexual citizenship, and the school setting: (1) compartmentalisation; and (2) choose one and reject the other (C. Strauss, 1997). The adoption of these strategies shows the important role of professional identity in the provision of sexuality education.

9.2.1 Compartmentalisation: a Strategy Adopted by Nantamu Grace

The interactional component of cultural schemas makes teachers conform their behaviour to the school setting and to the relationship they have with their students. As a result, the content of teachers’ sexuality education messages may vary depending on the type of school they teach in, or whether sexuality education is taught inside or outside the school setting. Furthermore, teaching of sexuality education may be motivated by teachers’ schemas of students and their sexual citizenship, including their perceived level of maturity and sexual activity. These schemas may not only be based on general cultural constructions of young people but also on teachers’ personal experiences of being a student, their daily interactions with students at school, and on special constructions of students as they are available in the school where they work (Harkness et al., 1992).

Teachers may apply compartmentalisation to internalise conflicting schemas arising from the interaction between their cultural schemas of professional identity, the school context, and students and their sexual citizenship. As discussed in Chapter 3, compartmentalisation means that their conflicting schemas are internalised in unconnected schemas which are activated in different contexts (C. Strauss, 1997). This is illustrated by the case study of Nantamu Grace, who, prompted by her professional identity, adapts the content of her sexuality education messages to what is required of her in the context she is in, which helps her feel no conflicts when teaching sexuality education.

At the time of the first interview in November 2011, Nantamu Grace [pseudonym chosen by participant] is 37 years old, married, and has four children. She has a Master’s degree in Education, Policy, Planning and Management. She has been a teacher for ten years now and teaches Home Economics in a public secondary co-educational day school and at university. Furthermore, she and her husband are both pastors at a Pentecostal church. She says that she
has not been trained to teach sexuality education, but she did receive training in premarital counselling.

She teaches sexuality education in three places: in her subject of Home Economics at secondary school and at university, which includes topics of family life and family planning, and to teenage girls in church. As a Christian, she feels that young people should not have sex before marriage. Culturally, she says that “the issue of sex education has been silenced; it is quiet”, which makes it difficult for adults to teach sexuality education. Despite her cultural and religious beliefs about sexuality, Nantamu Grace feels that sexuality education is important for students; she knows that many young people are sexually active. Therefore, she believes that young people should be taught about contraception: “To me, I believe... if you find a student, and he’s moving with a condom, that is more the reason why such a student should be supported because they are promoting their lives! And maybe protecting the life of another person.”

Nantamu Grace says that her personal beliefs regarding teaching sexuality education are not decisive for the content of her sexuality education. Rather, she adapts her messages to the context in which she is teaching:

In the Christian setting... [...] you don’t... bring in such things... to children. You do not. [...] Yeah. So if I’m talking to Christian girls, I tell them to abstain. [...] But when I am in the class... it is also different. [...] I will tell them to use a condom, because they must. [...] Yeah, so... depending on the situation really. If a student comes privately, I will explain to him. If a student asks me in the middle of a class, it is an opportunity also to inform others, make them know. Yes, I would speak.

Although Nantamu Grace would answer questions from students honestly, she would never initiate discussions on the use of condoms and other contraception at secondary school because the school curriculum and school regulations do not allow her to. In contrast, she does discuss and demonstrate contraception at university because society considers university students mature and sexually active. The following quote shows how her teaching of sexuality education is embedded in cultural constructions of childhood:

We are more direct [in university]. We do not, like, beat around the bush. It is quite different. [...] If you demonstrated how... eh, a condom is used in a secondary setting, we fear that maybe a student... they go and practise [laughs] So we prefer that you’d rather keep... a student in the dark, when they don’t know particular things than [chuckles a bit] exposing them and then they go ahead and practise with the... Yeah... That’s what we think.

Nantamu Grace’s story shows how her teaching of sexuality education is motivated by her cultural schemas of students and the teaching setting. Her decision to teach abstinence-only in secondary school is motivated by her fear that she might lose her job if she were to deviate from the school curriculum and school regulations by initiating ‘immoral’ discussions of contraception:
9.2.2 Choose One and Reject the Other: a Strategy Adopted by Paul

Most teachers feel that they need to teach what is morally upright. In a validation interview in 2013, Paul [pseudonym chosen by participant], who is one of the initial research participants, reflects on the findings from the 2011 data collection.

At the time of the first interview in November 2011, Paul is 32 years old and has a partner, although they are not married. He has been a teacher for eight years now and teaches English Language and Literature in two secondary schools: one public and one private co-educational school with both day and boarding facilities. Paul says that he has been trained to teach sexuality education and that he teaches sexuality education within his subject of English and at school assemblies.

According to Paul, many teachers pretend that students are sexually innocent, rather than admit that students are already sexually active:

We assume they haven’t, they know nothing about sex. Interestingly, we even teach... we even teach students, girls, who are mothers, but... when we are talking... they have had kids, they have boyfriends, they are, some of them are even in relationships, they are married, and living with a man, we assume that all these are innocent, and we know, we are aware of it, but we give that message. ... Hm. To satisfy maybe our role [as teachers] that we should be telling these kids: walk in the right path, don’t have sex until you’re old enough, which is being an adult, being 18.

Paul’s quote illustrates how teachers may choose one cultural schema of students’ sexual agency — i.e. sexual innocence — and reject the other — i.e. sexually active students. By applying this strategy for internalising conflicting schemas, the construction of students as sexually innocent allows teachers to teach abstinence-only without jeopardising their students’ well-being. However, if teachers acknowledged that students are sexually active, contributing to students’ well-being would require teachers to adapt the content of their messages to more in-depth and accurate sexuality education, including provision of information about contraception, and this would raise conflicts in their cultural template. On the one hand, deciding to continue teaching abstinence-only while acknowledging that students need more information means that teachers no longer contribute to their students' well-being. On the other hand, providing the required information would jeopardise their own well-being by not being able to meet their own expectations of being a good teacher and having to be afraid of losing their job and the respect and status they enjoy in society for being a good teacher. For instance, Paul explains that teachers feel uncomfortable discussing issues of sex because of cultural norms and values. Acknowledging students’ sexual agency compromises the respectability of a teacher, whereas pretending they are innocent removes the need to address such issues. To ensure they preserve their dignity as a teacher, teachers may choose to give vague, general messages:
Okay, it’s a combination of different things. The shyness... of the teachers could be the way, the upbringing, we come from a society where sex is taboo, you don't talk about it in the open, you don't talk about... using a condom at the assembly, or you don't talk about such things. So, that is one thing. You could have, you could know, you could see a boy with a girlfriend, a girl with a boyfriend, and you know they are sexually active, but you... turn a blind eye, you want to pretend because you cannot talk about it.

Cultural norms and values can make teachers feel shy and immoral for discussing sexuality issues with students, as explained in the following quote:

Then secondly, the moral aspect of it. The personal ego, morally, you feel these young people should be off sex, and that’s what it is. I can’t, if I talk about sex as happening, or if I talk with them as if they are having sex, then I am abating them, I am encouraging them to even indulge in more sex and morally that is... not right. The moral perspective of the person... or the teacher... somebody can say: that teacher is encouraging kids to... use condoms, they are having, they are having sex.

In such cases, ‘pretending’ that students are sexually innocent enables teachers to practise their perceived role of having to teach what is morally upright. Even more, the following quote shows that teachers may feel like a failure when having to acknowledge that they have not been able to make students behave morally:

I think it is, what should I call it, a false paradise [chuckles], you want to feel... that [...] these kids are still young and they shouldn’t indulge in sex, [...] So... if you have a school and your feeling inside is that all these kids know about sex and they have indulged in sex, I think... you will look at yourself morally as a failure, you’ve not been able to bring them up or to give them properly. ... You have not been a good teacher, you are teaching [...] very sexually immoral or loose young people. ... [...] That’s why at the end of the day, we pretend... I haven’t seen, I don’t know, these kids are still young, they don’t have sex... it gives, it’s an ego thing, [...] and when you look at it, it’s a disadvantage to the, to the students, the children. Because [...] if you had talked to them, it would be better, maybe it would save one girl from getting pregnant.

Pretence of student sexual innocence, whereby teachers reject the cultural schema of students being sexually active, may be a coping strategy for teachers because it removes the abovementioned conflicts: teachers may feel that students who are not yet sexually active do not need comprehensive sexuality education and that abstinence-only messages are sufficient. In this case, teachers are able to live up to their professional identity because they have managed to control student sexuality, make students behave morally and protect their well-being.
9.3 Conclusion and Discussion

This chapter aimed to comprehend individual reasoning as supported by the cultural template for teaching sexuality education. To achieve this, a deeper interpretation and understanding of the findings discussed in the previous three chapters were obtained based on a revisiting of cultural schema theory and the validation study that took place in February 2013, during which the participating teachers were re-interviewed to reflect on the preliminary findings.

The cultural template visualised how teachers’ reasoning for teaching sexuality education gains motivational force depending on higher-level goals of contributing to their own and their students’ well-being. It showed that teaching sexuality education may not only be motivated by providing students with accurate and complete information about sexual and reproductive health and rights, for them to develop their sexual agency, but that it may also be motivated by other schemas that support the teaching of abstinence-only, such as protecting the school image by controlling students’ sexuality; contributing to students’ well-being by encouraging them to study and become morally upright individuals; and having to teach what is morally upright.

Revisiting cultural schema theory and the reflections of the two re-interviewed teachers on the preliminary findings revealed that teachers may apply two strategies to cope with conflicts arising from living up to their professional identity while teaching sexuality education: (1) compartmentalisation, whereby teachers adapt the content of their sexuality education messages to what is prescribed by the school setting; and (2) choose one and reject the other, whereby teachers pretend that students are sexually innocent, rather than acknowledge students’ sexual citizenship. Pretence of students’ sexual innocence can be regarded as a coping strategy that teachers adopt to be able to contribute to both their own and their students’ well-being when teaching abstinence-only sexuality education.