

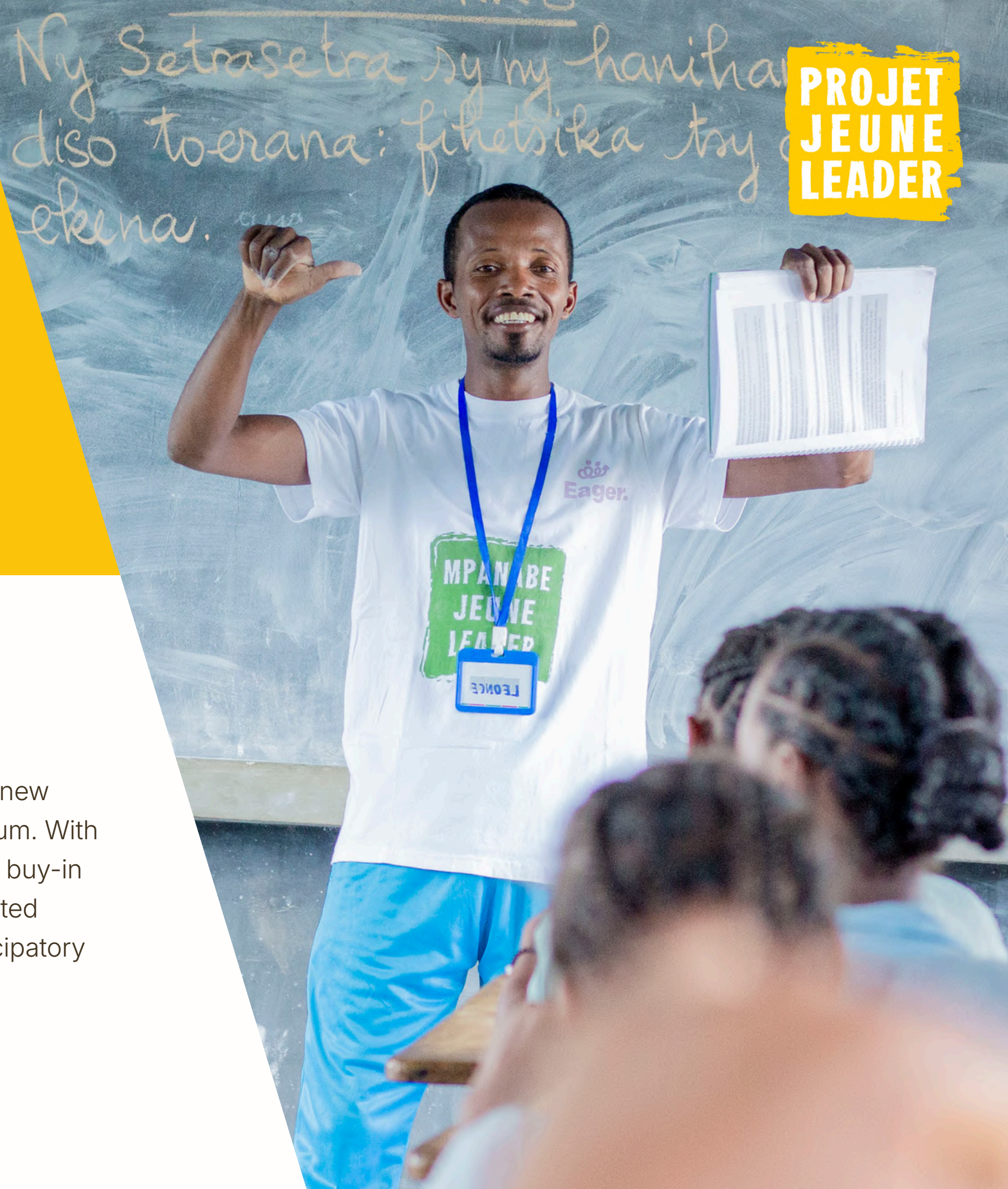
Scripted Lesson Plans

Enhancing quality delivery of
sexuality education at scale

Since 2013, Projet Jeune Leader has equipped thousands of young adults, teacher-trainees, and community and government teachers to deliver a new sexuality education subject in lower secondary schools in Madagascar.

Our curriculum — and how that curriculum is taught — is a foundational component of this new subject. In 2019, we made the decision to fully script lesson plans in the multi-year curriculum. With that change, we saw increased consistency and quality of teaching. We also saw improved buy-in from teachers and government partners, which has facilitated adoption and scale-up. Scripted lesson plans also allowed us to embed two critical characteristics into the curriculum: participatory pedagogy and gender-transformative content.

This brief explains why PJJ adopted a fully scripted curriculum for its sexuality education teachers, and the results of making the switch.



AT A GLANCE

Scripted Lesson Plans

Scripted lesson plans have their critics: they make teaching boring, strip teachers of agency and creativity, etc.

Our experience has shown the opposite.

With scripted lessons, we ensure every student receives the same content regardless of where they study or who teaches them. This **consistency** is especially critical for sexuality education content, because it **reduces the risk of teacher bias and omissions**. Scripted lessons also **ease the burden** on teachers and build the **transparency** schools and governments need to adopt the subject. Together, these components create a curriculum that is effective, and effective at scale.

WHY

Scripted lesson plans **improve the consistency of teaching quality and content delivery**, in turn improving student learning outcomes.

p.4

WHY

Scripted lesson plans are easy and transparent. This is key to **facilitating adoption and eventual scale-up** of a sexuality education subject.

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HOW

By baking **participatory pedagogy** into scripted lesson plans, engaged, learner-centered teaching actually improved.

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HOW

Scripted lesson plans allowed us to reduce bias and **embed gender-transformative messages** throughout the curriculum.

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Why Script a Sexuality Education Curriculum

Scripted lesson plans (SLPs) are increasingly being recognized as successful features of educational curricula.

Evidence suggests that SLPs:

- improve learning outcomes and focused learning time in the classroom;
- increase teachers' adherence to the curriculum; and,
- are particularly effective in low-income countries where teachers receive less training.

There is limited evidence on the use of SLPs in sexuality education, and to our knowledge it remains uncommon (with South Africa being an exception — see further reading). However, SLPs are well-suited to address some of the most common implementation challenges in this space, including piecemeal curriculum content, teacher discomfort, insufficient teacher training, and community misconceptions about sexuality education.



REFERENCES FOR FURTHER READING:

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Snapshot of PJJ's Curriculum

CORE CHARACTERISTICS

→ The curriculum is delivered through a **dedicated class — one hour per week — integrated in students' timetables** (i.e., taught during the school day) for a total of 27 classes per year.

→ The course is taught over **four years** of middle school (6th through 9th grade) following a sequential, age-segmented curriculum. This comes to a total of **108 classes or modules covered in total**.

→ The curriculum is delivered by **trained teachers** — in most cases, public school teachers who receive additional training and specialization to become CSE teachers, in addition to teaching their core subject.

→ The curriculum is **approved** by Madagascar's Ministry of Education.

THEMATICS

Our curriculum is holistic, designed to build young adolescents' **knowledge and self-confidence** around their physical and emotional development, while also **shaping positive attitudes** around gender and power.

It includes topics such as puberty, gender equality, communication, emotional intelligence, consent, healthy relationships, violence prevention, and more.

COMPLEMENTARY SUPPORT

Outside of the CSE class, CSE teachers are available for one-on-one, confidential **counseling** sessions with students. This serves as an important complement to the course so students can receive individualized support and advice, or to follow up on sensitive topics they may not feel comfortable broaching in class.

Why Scripting Improves Learning Outcomes



Scripted lesson plans improve the consistency of teaching quality and content delivery, in turn improving student learning outcomes.

Before we adopted a scripted curriculum, our curriculum took the form of a few key takeaway messages per lesson and a list of possible activities for teachers to pick. It provided a fair amount of latitude to teachers. With that came risk.

- Whether the key messages were transmitted accurately and effectively **relied upon the quality of the teacher:** their motivation and time to lesson plan, their public speaking and pedagogical skills, etc. This also relied on teachers remembering content that they were taught months or years earlier in pre-service training.
- The key messages — in the form of concise bullet points — **could leave details up to interpretation or bias.** Because sexuality education is still new and unfamiliar in Madagascar, many teachers lacked confidence and comfort with the content, despite extensive training. In these cases, they would either skip that lesson, or insert their own perspectives and sometimes non-factual information.

To mitigate these risks, we used to conduct in-person spot checks, coaching, and refresher training. However, **these approaches were not possible at scale**, as we began to work in more schools and in more remote rural areas.



BEFORE AND AFTER

Before adopting scripted curricula

Quantitative data showed vastly **disparate learning outcomes**. When looking at data across eight schools, for example, 100% of students in one school reported that they understood the day's lesson "well;" at the other extreme, a different school showed that only 29% of students understood the lesson "well." 0% of students in one school understood the lesson "not at all," but in another school, that figure was up to 39%.



After adopting scripted curricula

In the first year of using the new scripted curricula, rapid appraisal activities with 4,852 students throughout the year showed on average **higher comprehension** than prior (across the surveyed students, 79% understood the lesson taught that day well, 19% understood it somewhat, and only 1% did not understand it at all).

Importantly, there was significantly **improved consistency** in results across schools. Evaluations conducted since have continued to show these improved results.



Excerpt from our original non-scripted curriculum

THEME: What is puberty?

Key messages:

- Everyone must go through puberty. Do not be afraid of the changes that you will experience.
- Puberty marks the transition of children toward adulthood.
- Puberty doesn't begin at the same time nor is it exactly the same for everyone. Every person has their own experience. It's normal if your body isn't the same as your friend's!
- Hormones (estrogen, testosterone, progesterone) are what cause the changes during puberty.
- Puberty can begin somewhere between 9-13 years old.

Possible interactive activities (see activity booklet):

- Myth or reality?
- Brainstorming discussion

Translated from Malagasy

Excerpt from our scripted lesson plan

THEME: What is puberty?

Display the "hormone diagram" print-out on the wall. To open the discussion, explain the following:

Puberty is the period during which a child's body becomes an adult's body. Every person must go through puberty.

Starting at puberty, the body produces more chemical substances called "hormones." "Hormones" in French are called tsirim-panentana in Malagasy. "Hormones" are what gradually transform a child's body into an adult's body.

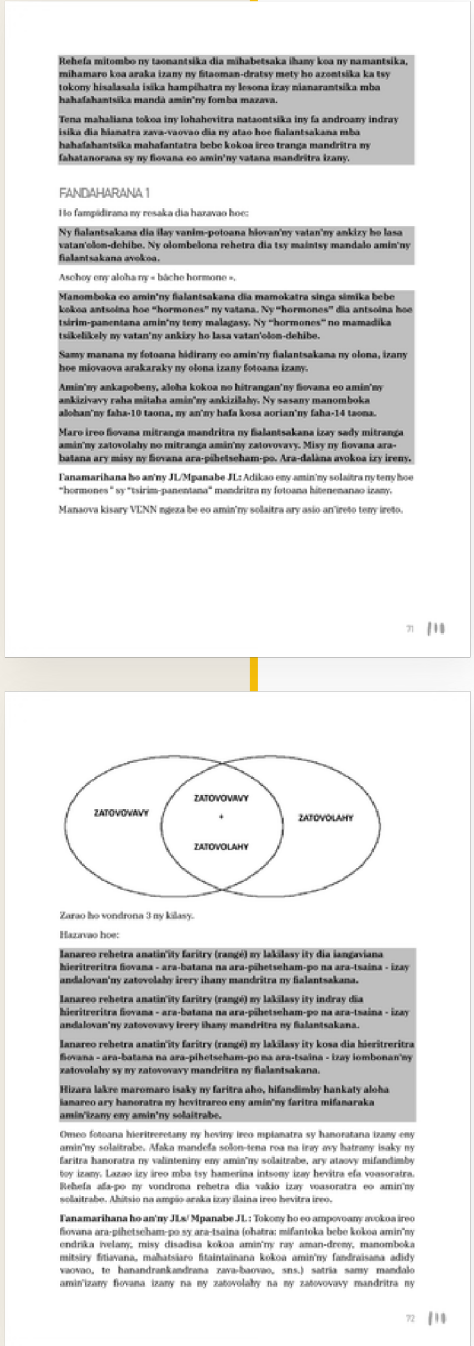
Everyone has their own timing for entering puberty. That timing varies from person to person. Generally, changes occur earlier in girls than in boys. Some start before age 10, while others don't start until after age 14.

Many of the changes that occur during puberty happen in both boys and girls. Some changes are physical, and some are emotional. These are all normal.

Write the words "hormones" and "tsirim-panentana" on the board as you say them.

Next, draw a large Venn diagram on the board like in the image below. [...]

Lesson plan continues with multiple more activities and explanations.



Why Scripting Improves Program Adoption

→ Teachers Prefer a Scripted Curriculum

The scripted curriculum has proved to be key to **increasing CSE educators' confidence and motivation**.

One barrier to CSE implementation is that teachers don't want to be burdened with another responsibility. We hear similar grumblings at the start of every training with new batches of teachers. Introducing scripted lesson plans starts to alleviate their concerns about the workload, because unlike their other subjects, **it requires little preparation**.

Teachers report that our curriculum is **simple to use** because it's scripted. We also work to make it as user-friendly as possible — making sure instructions for the teacher are clearly differentiated from text meant to be read aloud to students, for example. We pre-test each lesson plan to catch complicated sentences or words that teachers stumble over.



Scripted lesson plans are easy and transparent. This is key to facilitating adoption and eventual scale-up of a sexuality education subject.



What motivates me to lead the CSE subject is that the lessons to be taught are already in the curriculum. I no longer need to do time-consuming preparation and find content to teach, I just need to do several readings to familiarize myself with the content. It's different from other subjects.

CSE teacher

You don't need to make anything up; it's all in the lesson already. Principals and other teachers see my curriculum and they say, 'Wow, it's a complete and pre-programmed package, that's awesome, we wish our lessons were like that, too.'

CSE teacher

In most cases, our program is teachers' first exposure to sexuality education. Given the stigma around many of the topics our curriculum covers, many teachers are initially uncomfortable with delivering this content. Again, these concerns are alleviated through the scripted lesson plans. Teachers can see upfront what they are expected to teach, which **prevents misconceptions and apprehension**. They are given the words to teach in sensitive and clear ways, which **increases their confidence** in their ability to deliver otherwise unfamiliar content.

→ **Schools and Government Partners Prefer a Scripted Curriculum**

Our scripted curriculum has been **essential to building government buy-in** and, subsequently, to scaling up our CSE program.

- **Scripted lesson plans offer full transparency.** This allowed Ministry of Education officials to review and approve all content, clearing the way for the CSE subject to be delivered nationally with greater trust and mutual alignment.
- **Government partners and school officials care that the program is "easy" to deliver.** Ministry of Education decision-makers feared that introducing anything new to teachers and principals would lead to pushback. With our scripted curriculum, the opposite happened: they heard from CSE teachers praising the time and effort saved by using a scripted curriculum.

How Scripting Lessons Improves Teaching Quality

One criticism of scripted lesson plans is that they stifle teacher agency and participatory pedagogy (for example, see Piper, Sitabkhan, et al., 2018, which found some instructors adapted lesson plans to be less participatory and interactive). This has not been our experience:

With a scripted lesson plan in hand, CSE teachers have been **more likely to use participatory teaching techniques**, given that they are baked into the easy-to-use lesson plan and require little additional creativity on their part.

Most public school pedagogy in Madagascar is traditional, relying on rote lecture and memorization. Without our scripted curriculum, teachers **would be unlikely to use participatory pedagogy** out of their own initiative.

During After Action Reviews, CSE teachers expressed that the scripted lesson plans allowed them to **focus more on their tone and energy on engaging their students** because they did not need to come up with detailed explanations or activities on the spot.

Importantly, we include multiple sessions in CSE teachers' pre-service training on participatory pedagogy, how to use the scripted curriculum effectively, and how to create empowering classroom cultures.



By baking participatory pedagogy into scripted lesson plans, engaged, learner-centered teaching actually improved.



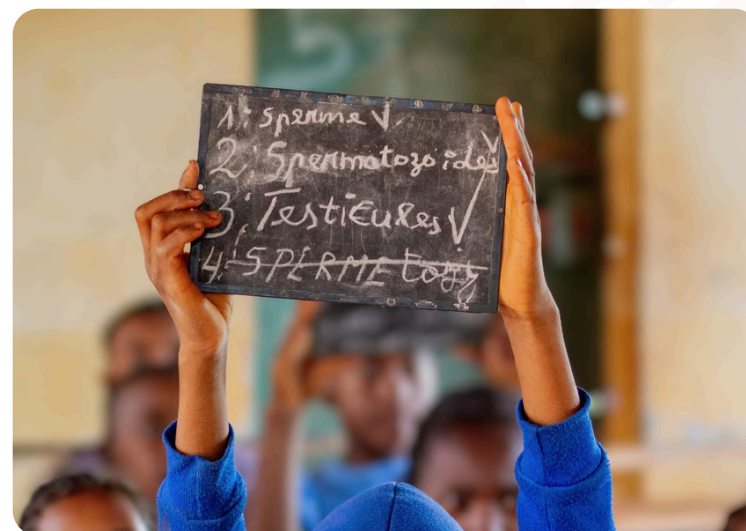


Participatory Methods

Most of our CSE teachers have large class sizes (40+ students, on average); and in highly resource-constrained public schools in rural Madagascar, most of their classrooms lack supplies, electricity, etc.

Despite these constraints, **simple formats keep students engaged.** Common types of activities we embed in lesson plans include:

- Easy group icebreakers, energizers, and mindfulness activities (simple movements, chants/songs).
- Short stories and skits that the educator or students can act out.
- Diagrams and drawings on chalkboard, which is usually available in every classroom.
- Pair-share and small group discussions with share-outs.



We really enjoy the [CSE] class. We have become more self-confident thanks to attending the class. We are eager to participate when the teacher asks us questions. Doing the activities and games in class is really enjoyable.

Middle school student

What really helps me implement the program is that there's a big curriculum book for teachers. Reading through it makes the teaching so much easier to carry out. It keeps reminding me: 'this is what I'm supposed to do.' And the curriculum itself is nice and straightforward, with everything it's trying to say coming through clearly."

CSE teacher

How Scripting Embeds Gender-Transformative Content

Our CSE program intervenes during early adolescence, a key developmental period during which gender socialization intensifies and young people first encounter rigid norms and stereotypes. For this reason, our CSE program is intentionally gender-transformative, working to transform unequal gender power relations through substantive discussions on gender, power, and identity.



Scripted lesson plans allowed us to reduce bias and embed gender-transformative messages into the curriculum.

CSE programs that explicitly address gender and power are 5x more likely to be effective in prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections than those that don't.

Haberland, N. A. (2015). The case for addressing gender and power in sexuality and HIV education: A comprehensive review of evaluation studies. *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*.

Our curriculum is gender-transformative in a few ways (see a few examples on the following pages):

- It works to transform unequal gender power relations through substantive discussions on gender, power, and identity.
- It engages both girls and boys in every topic and engages both as agents of change.
- It uses intentional language and examples to break down stereotypes and harmful norms.

Scripting the curriculum has been essential to achieving this. Given entrenched gender norms in Madagascar, particularly in rural areas, teachers are likely to bring in bias in their linguistic choices, examples, and messaging — intentionally, or unintentionally.



Mitigating against personal bias

We've been using scripted curricula with PJJL-hired CSE educators for nearly a decade. These have been educators we selected (and trained) through a public recruitment process, so we could intentionally select candidates based on their positive gender attitudes, open-mindedness, and other desired characteristics.

But beginning in 2021, we started training existing public school teachers to become CSE teachers. In these cases, **we had little influence over the teachers selected for the role.**

We hypothesized that these teachers' attitudes towards gender and youth sexuality would have an adverse influence on their implementation of the CSE program, and in turn, students' outcomes.

"Process and outcome evaluation of a government model of Projet Jeune Leader's comprehensive sexuality education program." February 2024. Projet Jeune Leader. (Unpublished)

In the pilot year working with these teachers, we closely tracked their attitudes towards gender and youth sexuality before and after they taught the curriculum, and the curriculum's effects on their students.

From a sub-sample of ten schools and teachers that we assessed closely, it appeared that **IF the teacher had a reasonable classroom size AND they taught the curriculum as intended, there were benefits on students' knowledge and attitudes.** This was the case irrespective of the CSE teachers' own personal attitudes towards gender and sexuality (which were sometimes consistently negative). In other words, students' knowledge and attitudes still improved and became more gender-equitable **even if the CSE teacher did not necessarily personally espouse those beliefs, as long as they followed the scripted lessons.**



IN PRACTICE: EXAMPLE 1

One characteristic of gender-transformative CSE is explicit engagement of both girls and boys in topics that traditionally are seen as affecting or involving only one gender. But if careful attention is not paid to the language used in teaching, harmful gender norms can easily be reinforced.

Lesson 12 (7th grade): Menstrual Hygiene and Health

Gender Transformative

Translated excerpt from
PJL scripted curriculum

"Menstrual hygiene isn't a concern for girls alone. In our lives — whether we're male or female — we may all encounter someone who needs help with their period. That could be a sibling, a friend, a loved one, a relative, or even a future spouse or child. It's therefore essential for all of us to understand health and hygiene during menstruation, so that we can support and care for the loved ones around us."

Reinforces Gender Stereotypes

Hypothetical example

"Menstrual hygiene only concerns girls, since they're the only ones who get periods. It's therefore their own responsibility to manage their hygiene during this time. Girls need to learn how to take care of themselves and maintain good hygiene during menstruation in order to avoid health problems."





IN PRACTICE: EXAMPLE 2

Across the curriculum, we pay particular attention to subtle linguistic choices that can counteract (or, if not careful, reinforce) gender stereotypes. For example, in stories/skits, we try to use gender-neutral names or place male students in traditionally female roles and vice versa. Without this embedded in the script, teachers are likely to use instinctual names, examples, or pronouns — likely reinforcing traditional gender norms.

Lesson 6 (7th grade): Giving Constructive and Useful Feedback

The following is an excerpt from a unit on giving constructive feedback. In the story, the main character, Chrystian (a male student) is participating in a sewing club (which most Malagasy students would assume to be an activity for girls only). While this is not the main point of the story — which instead kicks off a discussion on assertive communication and forms of feedback — it begins to normalize shifted gender roles.

Gender Transformative

Translated excerpt from
PJL scripted curriculum

"Chrystian has joined the school's sewing club. Today, they're doing embroidery. Chrystian is embroidering the letter C. The classmate sitting next to him is embroidering a flower. Chrystian tries to strike up a conversation: 'This is really hard. But I like how it's turning out!'" His classmate looks at Chrystian's embroidery and replies: "I prefer mine. My flower turned out really well. Look at yours — your C is really crooked!" After saying that, the classmate turns to talk to the student sitting behind them. [...]"



LOOKING FORWARD

Opportunities



► Local Dialects and Linguistic Adaptation

As we've scaled into new regions, a new has surfaced: our standardized scripted lesson plans, which are what make delivery at scale possible, don't always translate cleanly across Madagascar's dialects. CSE teachers in new regions we recently began working in reported needing to adapt the official Malagasy script into local dialect in real time to ensure students actually understand the content.

Encouragingly, teachers say they preserve the substance of each lesson even as they adapt its language, but it's time-consuming and tiring for them. Going forward, we see an opportunity to develop lightweight, region-specific glossaries or annotated scripts that flag concepts that don't apply well everywhere.

► Institutionalizing the Curriculum as an Examined Subject

One of our next goals is to work toward institutionalizing the curriculum within the national education system as a formally examined subject. CSE teachers, principals, and even students have encouraged this, as exam stakes would increase how seriously students take the subject.

Achieving that kind of formal recognition will require substantial curricular reform within the national Ministry of Education. In the meantime, we're working to introduce lighter-touch assessments at the school level, so the subject is not yet part of the national official middle school exams but is included in students' report cards.

PROJET JEUNE LEADER

Projet Jeune Leader (PJL) is youth-founded, women-led organization in Madagascar working to ensure that every adolescent has essential knowledge, skills, and support through comprehensive sexuality education (CSE).

We train, equip, and support specialized teachers to deliver a comprehensive sexuality education subject in Madagascar's middle schools. They teach a structured 4-year curriculum across grades 6 through 9, targeting adolescents aged 10-15. Beyond the classroom, teachers offer students individual counseling, referrals to services, and workshops for their parents.



www.projetjeuneleader.org



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