

Where and, if at all,
how should sexual
education be
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[Family](#), [Parents](#)



Sexual education: annotated bibliography

Brewer, G., Brown, M. B., Migdal, M. J. The importance of appropriate sexual education. Washington, D. C.: the Center for Inquiry Office of public Policy, 2007. Web

The paper investigates the role of school programs about human sexuality, providing the overview of existing programs and criticizing abstinence-only sexual education. After having observed differences between abstinence-based sexual education in the U. S. and programs, functioning in other industrialized countries, authors have provided their views on comprehensive sexual education program to be developed in the U. S. This source is crucial for the research as it provides multifaceted view on importance of sexual education and basic comparison between the U. S. and other countries' approaches to the issue.

Birden, S. Rethinking sexual identity in education. Lanham: Rowmann&Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005. Print

The book explores the ways to use sexual education as a tool to combat discrimination and abuse against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and questioning persons. The role of sexual values of liberty and experimentation in sexual education is being discussed. The source is going to be used to explore the way sexual orientation-related issues are to be highlighted in sexual education.

Doan, A. E., Williams, J. C. The politics of virginity: abstinence in sex education. Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008. Print

The source reflects on abstinence-only promotion approach from the point of view of human sexuality development and the need to work out alternative

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programs.

Kendall, N. The sex education debates. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012. Print

Peculiarity of the source lies in describing the reflections of gender roles, diversity, sexual orientation and rape in sexual education.

Landry, D., Darroch, J., Singh, S., Higgins, J. Factors, associated with the content of sexual education in U. S. public secondary school. Perspectives on sexual and reproductive health, 35(6), pp. 261-269., 2003. Print

The study discusses controversies, associated with sexual education in the U. S., mainly addressing the conflict between abstinence and more comprehensive approach. Special attention to the ways to approach sex-related preventive behavior, is paid, making the study topical for our analysis.

Levesque, R., J. (ed.). Sexuality education: what adolescents' rights require. NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2003. Print

Peculiarity of the source lies in the fact that it explores the roles state, religion, parents and schools play in sexual education of adolescents, as well as challenging nature of sexual education in economic, informational, cultural and global terms.

Magoon, K.(2009). Sex education in schools. Edina: ABDO, 2009. Print

The book provides the overview of historical context of sexual education in the U. S., clearly describing the goals of sexual education, main topics to be explored and basic considerations against sexual education at schools.

Clearly highlighted arguments and concerns of proponents and opposition to

sexual education in the U. S., are of great explorative value for the research.

Provenzo, E. T. Religious fundamentalism and American education: the battle for the public schools. NY: SUNY press, 1990. Print

The work is dedicated to describing the interrelations between religious and sexual education in American schools. As church is considered to be one of key sexual abstinence promoters in society, exploring the topic, highlighted above, helps to add one more dimension to the research

Weaver, A. D., Byers, S. E., Sears, H. E., Cohen, J., Randall, H. E. S. (2002).

Sexual health education at school and at home: attitudes and experiences of New Brunswick parents. The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality, 11(1), 2002, pp. 19-31, Print

The study shows attitudes of parents in Canada to sexual education, and documents their view on where and how sex education must be conducted.

Wight, D. The effectiveness of school-based sex education: what do rigorous evaluations in Britain tell us? Education and Health, 29(4), pp. 67-73, 2011.

Print

Research represents the insight into effectiveness of sexual education programs across Great Britain. Results of the study suggest that it is necessary to consider non-school options to complement sexual education at schools. The source can be used as an example of sexual education program and its effects.

Introduction

The question on where and, if at all, should sexual education be conducted, is one of most topical in discussions among politicians, religious leaders,

teachers and parents of schoolchildren. According to Brewer, Brown and Migdal, sexual education is of great importance for school curriculum due to the fact that it represents a response for high rates of teens' pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV (1-2). While the easiest option for adults is to promote abstinence-only approach as single possible response to adolescent sexuality, it is worth remembering that the decision to have sex is being influenced by complicated combination of feelings, which include love, romance, intimacy and physical attraction, as well as the fact that this decision is being characterized by life-altering consequences (Magoon, 7). Thus more comprehensive approach is to be introduced. For the purposes of this assignment we will explore the role of different social institutes in sexual education, tackling both formal and non-formal aspects of the issue, to consider "where" part of the question. To decide on "how" question, I would concentrate on current debate on abstinence-only education programs, and explore specific issues, which are to be covered in terms of sexual education.

- Where should sexual education be conducted
- Informal forms
- Sexual education at home

The legal system has traditionally assumed that parents are best of all situated to guide children in terms of sexual education, attitudes and values (Levesque, 5). Thus traditional legal procedure provides parents with the right to lead the growth of their children, especially with regard to education. State's intervention in family upbringing and education of children is currently limited in order to promote diversity of education environments,

being created in families. Conducting sexual education may be difficult for parents, who are not fully confident in the fact that their adolescent children trust them. The task can be even more complicated, if parents need to conduct early exploration of sex-related issues for their pre-school age children. In order to help themselves, parents can choose to firstly obtain special counseling, attend parent information meetings at school or read specific literature. Most important family aspects of shared responsibility for sex education relate to providing a child with the family perspective; helping him/her stay direct and honest, when discussing sensitive issues and maintaining open dialogue with educators at school regarding school sex education-related program. The results of research on parents' perception of their role in children's sexual education, having been conducted in New Brunswick, Canada, shows that few parents actively discuss sexual health-related topics with their children, while looking forward to schools' providing parents with sexual education information before it is being disseminated to children and providing information, helping to discuss sexual health topics with their children (Weaver, Byers, Sears, Cohen and Randall, 30). It is also important to remember that loneliness and lack of attention in family can cause adolescent's early engagement into sexual activities and often change of sexual partners, therefore, parents are expected to trace child's emotional condition and help him/her being needed.

- Sexual education in youth organizations

Peer pressure, as well as the feeling of loneliness, represents one of reasons for children's early engagement into sexual activities. Youth organizations can not only help the adolescent feel more engaged into society, provide

support to their members and promote creating friendly atmosphere, but help the members to develop their knowledge and values in terms of human sexuality, contributing to the implementation of shared task of sexual education of adolescents. Special youth organizations and NGOs are to be launched to anonymously help children and adolescents, who have suffered sexual abuse, including providing them with sex-related education and counseling, so that they do not experience psychological problems, when becoming engaged into close relationships. The study of British school sex education programs suggest that the need exists to complement conventional sex education with much broader societal initiatives, aimed at tackling most wide-spread social determinants related to sexual behavior (e. g., sexual and violent content in the media and computer games, social patterning of sexual attitudes and behaviours etc.) (Wight, 72)

- Sexual education and religion

Religious influence is a significant factors with regard to children's access to sexuality education (Levesque, 10). In the U. S. separation of school and church principle presumes unconstitutionality of any school courses, containing religious elements. Despite this fact, religion continues to exert influence on public opinion and, therefore, on school curriculum, which is being characterized by prevalence of promoting abstinence-only approach. Attempts to adopt a more comprehensive approach to sex education at schools is likely to be viewed by religious fundamentalists as a highly negative phenomenon due to the fact that fundamentalists tend to view sexual education as the means to eradicate Christian values and Christian behavior relating to sexual activities (Provenzo, 69). Apart from facilitating

public discourse on sexual education and employing efforts to influence school curriculum related to sexual education, religious activists tend to include sex education units into voluntary sex education and influence children's and adolescents' perceptions on sexual activities via their parents, belonging to same religious communities.

- The role of state in sexual education

One of most important prerequisites of democracy is respect for diversity. In this regard the question regarding the management of diversity (mostly in terms of religious beliefs) arises, when school curriculum on sex education is being considered. Two mutually exclusive approaches have been developed by the U. S. Supreme Court (Levesque, 7). On the one hand, it can be considered that limitations to participation in federally approved school courses, can be viewed as the violation of educational rights of students, whose observance is being facilitated by state. On the other hand, parents can be considered to be legally able to overpower the right of teachers to teach and the right of students to get educational materials. Finally, the overview of most recent cases of the U. S. Supreme Court suggests that parents share a fundamental interest, invested in the education of their children, and, therefore, any limitation of access to federal educational programs is to be viewed as the limitation of the rights of not only teachers and students, but also students' parents. Using its legislative powers, the state is capable of either directly determining institutional organization and scope of sexuality education programs, or granting these powers to other stakeholders at different levels of governance.

- Schools and sexual education

As it was mentioned before, sexual education in public schools is an important tool in providing vast majority of children and adolescents with the access to sexual health information. In the light of growing teenage pregnancy rates and wide-spread nature of sexually transmitted diseases, as well as frequent reflections of sex-related issues in the media, the need to conduct sexual education in public schools can hardly be questioned.

- How should sexual education be conducted
- Exploring controversy between abstinence-only and comprehensive approaches
- Abstinence-only approach
- Nature of the approach

Abstinence is reported to be the only form of sexual education in a third of the U. S. public schools, while federal funding is being generously allocated for promotion of abstinence from sex as the only way to avoid teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV (Doan&Williams, 2-4). Abstinence-only-centered programs tend to emphasize social, psychological and health gains to be reached through abstaining from sexual activities; consider abstinence being a standard for those, not being married as a contrast to monogamous relationships within the context of marriage and stress possible harmful consequences of sexual activities and bearing children out of the marriage context, as well as teach the ways sexual advances are to be combated. Effectiveness of such an approach is questionable against the background of natural development of human sexuality, taking place in adolescence, peer pressure, being experienced by school-age children with regard to sexual activities, as well as sexual content

of modern media and computer games.

- Drawbacks of abstinence-only approach

Lack of effectiveness is considered to be the main drawback of abstinence-only programs. There is no guarantee that abstinence-only education will actually prevent school-age children from being engaged into sexual activities. Abstinence-only approach can be associated with “prohibiting” children to have sex, so, as every prohibition, this approach can lead to children’s engaging into sexual relations at young age to get the “forbidden fruit”. Furthermore, as abstinence-only education tends not to pay or pay only limited attention to teaching students how to use contraceptive methods, it can be considered to contribute to increasing rate of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Another possible influence of the fact that abstinence-only approach stresses importance of virginity, may manifest itself in children’s more actively engaging in non-vaginal sex-related risky behaviours, such as anal and oral sex (Landry, Darroch, Singh and Higgins, 268).

Analysis of these drawbacks inevitable leads the analyst to the conclusion that an alternative is necessary to be worked out in order to prevent negative effects of abstinence-only approach.

- Comprehensive approach to sexual education

As opposed to abstinence-only approach, comprehensive sex education does not contain the emphasis on promoting specific sexual attitudes and behaviours, while covering an extremely wide range of topics related to human sexuality, including sexual behavior and abstinence, methods for pregnancy and STD prevention, as well as prevention services for HIV/AIDS.

Taking into account drawbacks of abstinence-only approach and context, which schoolchildren are raised within, many researchers currently emphasize the necessity to shift the debate from discussing whether and how abstinence is to be promoted to how to teach students about condoms and other safety methods (Landry, Darroch, Singh and Higgins, 268). Apart from topics related to sexual behaviours and prevention methods, comprehensive sexual education is to include a perspective on variety of specific issues, which adolescents are likely to encounter in relation to human sexuality, including gender roles with regard to sexual activities, sexual orientation, and violence and rape.

B) Specific issues in sexual education

1. Gender roles

Societal developments of the twentieth century allowed vast majority of countries in the world enter twenty-first century with the vision, providing for equality of men and women in all spheres of life. Nevertheless, it is not worth forgetting that equality in legal and social terms does not preclude men and women from being biologically different. Despite the need to avoid gender roles stereotyping, it is important to conduct sex education lessons since pre-school age to help children get to know the difference between sexes and give students a basic vision of male and female sexual roles in society, as related to relationships between men and women, marriage, parenthood and family life. Children's assuming importance of gender roles in society is also helpful with regard to combating gender discrimination in the future.

2. Sexual orientation

In terms of promoting diversity it is still important not to develop heterosexism-centered programs, either avoiding the issue of homosexuality or stating that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality (Birden, 6).

Taking into account the societal effects of anti-LGBTQ prejudice, it is important to establish an open dialogue on LGBTQ issues, starting from public schools' sexual education. In the classroom sexual identity should be viewed as one of manifestations of every person's identity (e. g., along with national identity), and the culture of acceptance and tolerance is to be promoted, regardless of possible valuations. Including sexual identity topic into sexual education curriculum contributed to combating LGBTQ discrimination

- Violence and rape

Sexual behaviours are often associated with violence and even rape both in real life and media discourse. In terms of relations between male and female violence sometimes tends to manifest itself continuously, converting into domestic violence. The most controversial issue with regard to making students aware about violence, accompanying sexual activities, is whether it is worth fully covering the links between such notions as rape, violence, and consumerism, responsibility and sexuality (Kendall, 222). The effect is likely to lie in forming an impression of males as initial consumers of women's sexuality. It is evident that such a consequence can easily exert negative influence on students' further attitudes towards sexual activities, making them too suspicious in intimate relations. Possible psychological effects of the unit under study should be previously consulted with psychologists to develop age-appropriate contents.

Conclusion

Results of the research suggest that sexual education should be a shared responsibility of parents of schoolchildren, youth organizations and school. The role of religion in influencing sex education should be specifically addressed with respect to separation of school and church, and observing students' educational rights. Parents tend to require external information support to be able to conduct sexual education. Comprehensive approach to sexual education is to be introduced in wider terms to combat negative effects of abstinence-only approach. Specific topics to be addressed in terms of sex education program should include the vision of gender roles, sexual orientation, as well as violence and rape.

Works cited

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