

Teaching of sexuality education in singapore



Our topic is Sexuality Education under the task “ Alternative”. By studying and analysing our case study on Netherlands, we seek to implement alternatives to increase parental involvement through the teaching of Sexuality Education in Singapore.

Rationale for choice

We have chosen sexuality education as our area of concern as the current methods in sexuality education is not effective in light of the modern youth culture. School-based sexuality education in Singapore is incorporated into science, health education and civics and moral education subjects. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has also introduced the “ Growing Years (GY)” series as well as “ Breaking Down Barriers (BDB)” programme which is compulsory for all government schools to adopt. Parents are also given the option to opt-out their children from attending these programmes.

In view of a more liberal and open-minded society, youths are increasingly receptive to new ideas, and are easily and most influenced by the mass media. This is supported from our primary research, where students are asked on the degree of influence of the parents, teachers/counselors, peers and the media have on them in terms of providing them with knowledge and advice regarding sex education.

The progress of mass media has overtaken the current measures initiated by MOE in embracing healthy development of sexuality amongst the younger generation in Singapore. This is further substantiated by the increasing trend of teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), where they are engaging in sexual activities at a far younger age.

Thus, the role of parents in sexuality education is crucial in educating their children about sex in an environment of openness, thereby enhancing children's understanding on subject. The current approach of allowing parents to have the option of opting out their children from sexuality talks provided by the school contradicts with stand of MOE recognising that parents are the most important educator in sexuality education. Referring to our primary data gathered, 66% of the students surveyed feel that parents are not doing enough and are not actively involved in their sexuality education. Thus, by providing parents with the opt-out option, it does not fully engage or include them in educating their children and hence it is an inadequate approach taken by the MOE.

As compared to parents who are still embracing the more conservative Asian values, youths have vastly conflicting values and this results in differences between their mindsets altogether. Regardless of their backgrounds, parents have to step in and be responsible in educating their children on sexuality issues. However, there is difficulty in this as most parents are uncomfortable with discussing these issues with their children. This is a result of the new mindset of our generation on the topic of sexuality.

To counter the problem, the MOE should collaborate more closely with parents in order to alleviate the conflicting values of parents and youths with a more holistic curriculum that is, also, more applicable to our generation of youths. Hence, the alternatives must provide a strong and wider range of skills to teenagers in the dealing of sexuality issues. This topic is extremely important, as it addresses the younger population, who will form the bulk of our future stakeholders in Singapore.

Aims and Objectives

We aim to empower parents with better skills and knowledge in educating their children on sexuality issues. Our objectives are to:

To open up parents towards discussing the sensitive topic of sexuality to their children.

To promote effective parent-child communication.

To enable students think through the possible consequences of their decisions rather than turn them off with a moralistic approach.

Scope of project

Target Audience

Parents: Our primary target audience is parents of students from Raffles Girls' School (Secondary) and Raffles Institution (Secondary).

Students: Our secondary target audience is students from secondary schools.

Research Focus

With the main focus on increasing parental involvement in sexuality education, we plan to carry out our project over a span of 5 months through a multi-tiered approach; encapsulating both the affected group (Youth) as well as the wider community they are a part of (Families/parents and School), covering our primary aim (healthy development of sexuality for youths).

Research Methodology

Primary Data

We interviewed Mr Leo Hee Khian, a student Advisor from Raffles Institution.

Online surveys were given out to secondary school students from government and independent schools. This is to ensure a better representative of the student population in Singapore as schools carrying Integrated Programmes may offer a different approach in carrying out their sexuality education program to their students.

Surveys were also distributed to parents through the Raffles Parents' Association (RPA) and Parents for Raffles Girls' School Association (PRGS Association) to gather information on their beliefs and mindsets regarding the current pedagogy and curriculum of Singapore's sexuality education so as to help us craft a better method of instruction.

Secondary Data

As sexuality education is a sensitive yet important issue, there have been many active discussions on online forums as well as newspaper articles relating to the content of its curriculum. There are a variety of published reports and journals on all aspects of sexuality education which are available for review. We reviewed several case studies of different countries using the internet resources on how they deliver their curriculum, catering to children and youths of different age groups. The role of parents in educating their young is also studied to gather information on how they can contribute most effectively in developing their children.

CHAPTER 2 – CASE STUDY: NETHERLANDS AND USA

Netherlands

Overview

The Dutch Model was formulated, focusing on 'empowerment and mutual respect' in a relationship among youths. + parent involvement

Advantages

The Dutch Model provides accurate information regarding risks associated with pre-marital sex and adequate information regarding contraception and birth control methods. It focuses on values, attitudes, communications and negotiation skills. It helps youths to deal with peer and other social pressures; providing opportunities to practice communication, negotiation and assertion skills.

Disadvantages

Sexuality education syllabus might not be comprehensible to young children and hence the effectiveness of curriculum may be questioned. As sexuality is a sensitive topic, it may cause parents to opt their children out of the programme. The Dutch Model does not eliminate the risk of pregnancies or STDS as it excludes the teaching of contraceptive methods to youths.

United States of America (USA)

Overview

Sex education in USA primarily focuses on advocating abstinence, but more schools are now offering abstinence-plus curriculum. There are many

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vendors and organizations which have various programmes catered to different age group and a range of socio-economic background, such as white middle-class, African-americans, poor, parents of 11-15 years old.

Advantages

Through abstinence and abstinence-plus curriculum, the values of abstinence can play an important role in helping teenagers in resisting the media and peer pressure, as the youths are living in a sex-saturated culture where having casual sex is the norm.

The abstinence-only curriculum focuses on two pronged approach: It places more emphasis on social, emotional and psychological aspects of sex; it also educates teenagers regarding love, intimacy and commitment. On the other hand, the abstinence-plus curriculum seeks to reduce teenage pregnancies and STDs as a result from “ unprotected” sexual activity; hence it teaches teenagers regarding contraception methods. Coupled with direct funding and support for the abstinence programme by the government, it allows more resources to be pulled in for a more effective sexuality education.

Based on surveys conducted, results has shown that there is overwhelming parental support for abstinence curriculum. Furthermore, since many parents in America are Christians, coupled with the fact that the majority of the religion in America preaches abstinence (no sex until marriage), as well as many abstinence related themes (love, commitment, etc), this will mean that most parents are fully aware of what their children are being taught in schools. Thus they can complement the current sexuality curriculum, making it more effective.

Disadvantages

With the comings of our X-generation youths, the idea of abstinence may not be relevant with the modern American society and culture. Teenagers are having a more liberal mindset, mainly as a result of the mass media. Surveys conducted showed that having pre-marital sex is the norm for many teenagers as a result of many factors, such as peer pressure and the modern pop culture.

While schools are largely involved in fight against teenage pregnancies, there is no standard curriculum taught to students throughout every school. Not all parents are agreeable on the content of curriculum due to differing views as a result of religious or race differences as some religions may not favour the abstinence or abstinence plus-approach.

Similarities drawn

USA was chosen as the second case as it is a very developed country with its people having a very liberal mindset, and this is something we aspire for Singapore to achieve, where parents and child will find it less awkward and more comfortable in discuss sexuality. Furthermore, both America and Singapore's sexuality education both emphasises on abstinence, hence, by learning the approach and the (positive and negative) implications of America's sexuality education, we can then apply it to Singapore's context. Like Singapore, USA is a multi-racial nation and hence this will no doubt affect the approach to teaching sexuality education as a result of differing views.

CHAPTER 3 – SINGAPORE

Current Trends on sexuality education

MOE set a framework on the sexuality education curriculum which all schools have to comply. The key guiding principles of sexuality education are:

Parents bear the main responsibility for the sexuality education of their children;

Sexuality education is premised on the importance of the heterosexual married family as the basic unit of society;

The teaching of facts is integrated with the teaching of values, which reflect that of the mainstream society;

Students will be taught to understand and respect the attitudes, values and beliefs regarding sexuality that other communities propagate;

Specially selected and trained teachers are to teach the Growing Years package; and relevant resources in the community will be brought in to complement school resources for sexuality education.

This framework encourages parents to be actively involved in educating their children as they “ bear the main responsibility”. While all government secondary schools are to adopt the Growing Years series and independent schools may have their own programmes, parents are able to have the option of opting out their children from the sexuality education package.

Alternatively, schools may engage external vendors approved by MOE. The current approved external organisations conduct programmes in the form of

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workshop and seminars as a pedagogy of teaching sexuality education, which only a few includes the participation of parents.

The need for involving parents

As parents are given the opt-in and opt-out option, this suggests that the sexuality education in Singapore is not a fool-proof plan. Essential issues involving the cognitive, emotional, social, physical and moral aspects of sexuality may be neglected by parents who chose to opt out their children from the programme. Embraced by conservative Asian values, these parents have not yet been fused with the liberal and open mindset that our world today shares. Furthermore, a large percentage, 70%, of the youths we surveyed felt that their parents were not being actively involved enough in their sexuality education.

Also, only one-quarter of the youths objected to their parents being involved in their sexuality education. Through research, we found that parents have a big influence in the decisions teens make about sex below the age of 16. However, from the results we gathered from our survey, it seems that many parents are not aware of the importance on the influence they have on their children's decision making. Hence, it is apparent that we have to bridge this gap in thinking and get the parents more actively involved in their children sexuality education programme.

Lessons Learnt

Confidence is key

Building good rapport between parents and child is important in breaking down generation gap as in enhances effective communication. This will

greatly reduce the extent of differing/conflicting views and beliefs, enabling parents to provide accurate information regarding sexuality issues to their children.

Parents are found to possess skills of being an educator, and their natural role in sex education is evident. Yet many parents are not realizing their full potential as an educator due to reasons such as being uncomfortable in talking with their children about the subject and also lack of knowledge about anatomy, physiology, or other related information. Hence, they often feel shy and embarrassed to hold discussions due to the lack of confidence in educating children on sexuality. Thus, agencies should consider integrating parents fully into their health education strategies.

Creating awareness of curriculum amongst parents

While the school provides basic sex education, parents must be aware that the knowledge and information presented or taught in schools are only supplemental, and parents themselves play a pivotal role in educating their children at home, since morality issues regarding sex are mostly not covered in schools. Thus moral issues and obligation must be taught by the parents of the child when it comes to sex.

The influence of mass media

Any parent can attest to the impressionable, unquestioning and imitative nature of their child, and since the mass media is one of the most prominent sources of the child's outlook of the outside world, the constant repetition of sexual contents on the television will no doubt influence the child's mindset to a certain extent.

Developed Strategies

Equipping parents

Schools can engage professionals, experts and even successful parents to deliver presentations or hold small workshops. Awareness is hence developed among parents on the importance of holding conversations with their children regarding sexuality education.

Parent -Teacher collaboration

To engage students through collaboration between parents and teachers in designing an effective use of pedagogy within the programme.

Engaging youths and parents on the net

Creating a forum to hold discussions enable youths to freely express their views or opinions regarding sexuality. Recognizing that most ideas conveyed by peers and the media may be misleading, we decided to rope in trainers/ counsellors qualified in the field of sexuality education to correct any misconception youths may have, and to provide proper advice to them. Also, by engaging parents to monitor these forums, they are able to contribute to the discussion by posting their views at the same time. This will benefit parents greatly, allowing them to have a general deeper understanding in youths

Proposed Alternatives

Parent Education Programs

Schools may tie-in school events with parent education programs to improve adults' skills for educating and communicating with youth, especially about sexuality and reproductive health.

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Reviewing the delivery of sexuality education programme

The Raffles Parents' Association can hold a meeting with teachers every 6 months to review the pedagogy of delivering the programme. During their reviews, they should include the views of parents about the content of the sexuality education programme that ought to be taught in school. The reason being that parents have a better idea of what their adolescents' mindset are about the topic of sex as well as the exposure that their teens have on the topic. This can be done by having feedbacks from parents online through the Raffles portal website, for ease of communication. With these feedbacks and reviews, our school can have a more efficient, relevant and effective way of delivering sexuality education messages to students as well as having a more impactful one.

Involving experts into youth online forums

As opposed to parents limiting the influx of information from the mass media which is extremely impractical, online portals (e. g. youth. sg) can be developed for adolescents to share their thoughts on the topic of sexuality. A sexuality education forum will be designed in the online portal such that open and healthy discussions can be fostered, occasionally with the advice of experts. Youths are able to pose questions and they are responded by qualified trainers and counsellors in this field.

CHAPTER 4: ACTION PLAN

Parent Education Programme (PEP)

Key Players / Stakeholders

Schools

Secondary schools serve as a platform in enabling parents to participate in the programs easily as their children keep them updated with upcoming important school events. Our target group will be Raffles Girls' School (Secondary) and Raffles Institution (Secondary) in particular.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

NGOs have the power to effect widespread change & place pressure on other key players to manage the trends. Examples of relevant expertise are the Institute of Advanced Parentology (IAP), Focus on the Family. Experts, professionals and facilitators in the relevant fields will be invited.

Successful parents

Parents who have successfully overcome their fear and/or embarrassment in communicating with their child regarding sexuality issues will be invited to speak.

Rationale for our proposed action plan/ course of action

Tying up with two important school functions such as Briefings to Secondary 1-4 Parents (held at the start of the every year the school principal) and Parent-Teacher Meetings (held in the second semester every year) will be useful in capturing a wide audience. This programme is to provide skills to

parents to communicate with adolescents through these two interactive workshops. Parents will thus be more equipped in educating their children about healthy sexual development and decision making.

Action Plan

The organising committee of the respective school functions will include a short Parent Education Programme workshop where presentations are held by health professionals and parenting experts from various NGOs of relevant field. More male facilitators will also be invited rather than most of the time only female facilitators are present. This is to encourage more participation of fathers because same-sex parent-child communication at home tends to work better. Successful parents will be engaged to share their experience on how they dealt with challenges while educating their children on sexuality issues. They will be able to provide information parents want and need as well as address the concerns and fears of the audience. These real-life examples will enable parents to acquire knowledge and information on how open communication can be cultivated in order to share their values and beliefs with their children effectively, while becoming more empowered to become effective sexuality educators of their children.

A mass mailing parents via the school describing the program will inform parents about the details of the available workshops. These workshops, tying in with school functions, will be scheduled on weekends (Saturday and Sunday) so as to avoid disturbing their work schedules during weekdays.

Feasibility

Parent talks are highly feasible as it has been done in most schools.

However, it is difficult to target all parents to stay on for talks given their busy day-to-day schedules and other commitments. They may have work obligations, particularly amongst the low income groups or families with sole breadwinners, where sexuality education may not be perceived as important in such families.

Solutions

To make the programme an impactful one, innovative and interactive presentation techniques can be used in conducting this workshop to captivate the interest of audience effectively. Also, incentives can be offered to encourage greater participation in workshops, including light refreshments and prizes such as vouchers and parenting books.

Reviewing the delivery of sexuality education programme

Key Players / Stakeholders

Raffles Parents' Association (RPA) and Parents of Raffles Girls' School Association (PRGS Association)

Parent support groups for the Raffles family. They represent the proportion of parents in Raffles, overseeing general matters in and out of the curriculum.

Teachers

They are the main source of medium in school which students get their sexuality education from. They deliver the curriculum and impart skills and knowledge to students.

Rationale for our proposed action plan/ course of action

Through the review of the curriculum, parents will have a better idea of their adolescents' mindset on the topic of sexuality as well as the exposure that they have on the topic. Hence, parents can provide valuable feedbacks and perspectives as to what should be included or emphasised on during the teaching of sexuality education to students.

Action Plan

Feedbacks are to be collected from parents through the RPA and PRGS Association online portals for the ease of communication. Also, we can utilise our Raffles main website to link parents to the portals for more convenience. The RPA and PRGS Association will hold a meeting with teachers at least once every 6 months to review the content and the pedagogy of the sexuality education curriculum designed by the Raffles schools. Valuable and insightful feedbacks from parents should be brought forth in these meetings, to be discussed and considered amongst the teachers and members of RPA and PRGS Association.

Feasibility

For this proposed alternative to be successful, we need the cooperation of parents to be actively involved and concerned about the contents taught to their children on the topic of sexuality. They have to know that they play a big role in their sexuality education.

Additionally, boys and girls differing biological makeup and hence, some content taught may not be relevant to each gender if sexuality education is taught to youth in general. Some important segments are thus left out which might be integral to the physical and psychological development of youths.

Solutions

A different curriculum can be catered to different gender to suit each gender's needs accordingly. All schools, depending if they are co-ed schools, may adopt two curriculums catering for each gender, so that sexuality education can be taught separately for the girls and boys.

Involving experts into online forums

Key Players / Stakeholders

SgForums. com

A reputable online portal which discusses a variety of topics related to the current world today. Prominent topics are put into forums, where netizens are accessible to the latest news and discussions. There is also a forum named SgSexForums dedicated to discussion about sexuality, and we are looking at integrating sexuality education into this forum. .

Professionals and experts

They will be invited to be on the panel of forum, so as to respond to any queries or views posed by youths. They are trained experts from local sexuality education vendors which are approved by MOE, as well as consultants and professionals majoring in the development of youth.

Youths

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Youths serves as an important voice for parents to have a deeper understanding on their views and concerns. This can help to narrow the communication gap between the two generations as parents are more aware of their needs and wants regarding sexuality education.

Schools

Given primary views expressed by students in the forum, schools will work around the needs and wants of the students, giving feedbacks to the MOE. Understanding what youths are concerned with, a more convincing curriculum can then be developed to address their needs.

Rationale for our proposed action plan/ course of action

Forums generally receive much attention from the Singaporean youth communities, and web portals such as STOMP and sgforums. com are known to represent the voice of the youth society. Although earlier research findings showed that media platforms render youths susceptible to negative messages about sexuality, nonetheless we still believe that they are powerful tools through which we can put our ideas across. We are looking at reconciling mass media and healthy discussion of sexuality issues, and this can be achieved through online forums discussing about the local sexuality education. Through proper designing of the forums and engaging trained experts on the relevant topics, we believe these online forums will help to ensure a more open sexuality education barring the constraints of school curriculum, whereby youths can make themselves heard. This helps us to achieve our objective of a more open-minded society towards sexuality

issues, which is instrumental in helping parents take charge of their children's sexual well being.

Action Plan

Two separate forums will be set up in the online portal catered to both youths and parents. All posts are accessible to the public, and this allows each stakeholder to be aware of the different viewpoints that youths or parents have. Certified experts from sex education vendors will be invited to initiate unfettered discussion about sexuality, and also answer various queries that youths or parents might have. In addition, we will engage parent support groups to monitor these forums and input their own experiences, fostering healthy debate. As such, any misleading views will be corrected by qualified professionals, preventing youths from obtaining incorrect information from unreliable sources on the net.

Feasibility

Popular local web forums like STOMP (Youthphoria) and youth. sg promote unconstrained discussions about social issues, and encourage youths to share about their perceptions of the world around them. Many forums are also initiated by youths to discuss the quality of their sexuality education. One limitation, however, would be that the forums might be prone to defamatory and provocative comments by insensitive users.

Solutions

Inappropriate comments may be marked as spam by other users, automatically hiding the comment. Also, parent support groups can be

tasked to take charge of these forums as administrators, primarily to fuel healthy debate about sexuality issues based on their own experiences.

Benefits of our plan

Primary Data

We managed to get results from a relevant yet wide spectrum of the population. This is evident from the ages of the respondents, which range from 13-18 as well as their educational level which include students from the secondary level and junior colleges. There is also an almost equal mix of responses from both males and females as well. With this, we can make sure that we can make sure that the spread across the population is not biased in any way due to dissimilarities between the above groups (e. g. hormonal differences, difference in academic requirements) and hence can bring representative results of all youths in general as required by our project topic.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Strengths

Through this project, we have gained a multifaceted understanding of the sexuality education situation in Singapore, through surveying and interviewing our key stakeholders. Value-added by extensive research online, we are now aware of the various knowledge gaps in the curriculum and our developed strategies can effectively resolve them. For example, one contradiction we identified would be that MOE allows parents to opt out of the curriculum, even though they stress the importance of parental involvement in school-based sexuality education.

Translating our plans into reality, through engaging trained experts to answer various queries posed by youths and parents, we are ensuring that youths do not receive the wrong information or get misled by unreliable sources from the internet. Furthermore, our Parent Education Programme (PEP) serves to increase parental awareness about their children's well-being at school, even if parents opt their children out of the sexuality education curriculum. Ultimately, we aim at enhancing parent-child communication and resolving the contradictions in the current curriculum through our developed strategies.

Limitations

Inaccuracy in survey responses from students and parents

There is a probability of them not being honest in answering questions due to conservative nature and sensitivity of topic.

Adolescents' resistance to parental involvement

Youths may be uncomfortable in expressing their views in forums in the presence of parents. Without adolescents' participation, the online portal will not be effective in serving as a platform for active and open discussions for both stakeholders.

Possible Improvements

An improvement would be expanding the scope to cater to various religions. Since Singapore is a multi-racial society, some religions may not preach values that are in line with what MOE offers on abstinence and the teaching of contraceptives. This would result in a conflict of interests among the

educators, parents, religious organizations and the teenagers themselves, who might be unsure as to which doctrine to follow. Hence, it would be best to develop a strategy that would extensively cater to the distinct religions in Singapore. This will allow parents to be more convinced in lending their support, after knowing that their religions' doctrines tie in with the proposed strategy.

Future Developments

We hope to extend the project by including parents from other Secondary Schools. We can use the results obtained from RI and RGS to gauge the effectiveness of our proposed alternatives and make further improvements. Successful parents, who have benefited from the alternatives proposed, can share their insights and lessons learnt from them, during the PEP conducted in other Secondary Schools.

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