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22/03/11 Should Sexual Education be taught in schools? Academic Reading, Writing and Research Skills EDFN 111B Lecturer: Barbara Constance Student: Jodianne Nicholas

Should Sexual Education be taught in schools? Sexual education is the process of acquiring information and forming attitudes and beliefs about sex, sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. It is also about developing skills that help adolescents make informed choices about their behaviour, and feel confident and competent about acting on these choices. Sexual education entails helping teenagers to protect themselves against abuse, exploitation, unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV and AIDS. There are many controversies surrounding the implementation of sexual education into the classroom as a regular part of instruction. It is a delicate issue and there are many pros and cons to this topic being taught in the public schools. Contrasting views as to whether it should be taught are held by parents and teachers alike. However according to Rhoda Reddock, UWI Deputy Principal, "SEX is something we need to take seriously; just like food, it is pleasurable but it could kill you. We just can't keep sweeping it under the carpet." Sex education aims to reduce the risks of potentially negative outcomes from sexual behaviour and it also helps fulfill the rights of the child to be adequately informed about matters that affect them. Therefore I believe sexual education should be taught in schools in Trinidad and Tobago because it would teach students about their body, let them be better informed and reduce promiscuity among teenagers. One reason why sexual education classes should be implemented in schools is because it would teach students about their body and what to expect. Halstead and Reiss noted that " just as one should learn something about the history and geography of one's country, one should learn something

about the history and geography of one's body. Equally girls should learn about boys' bodies and vice versa. " (2003, p. 138). There are those that argue that sexual education should be taught exclusively at home and it should be up to the parents' discretion to determine what information is appropriate to relay to their children given factors such as age and maturity level. However, many parents lack the knowledge themselves and are not at ease with discussing sexuality with their children. Halstead and Reiss (2003) stated that " one of the great values of school sex education is that it can allow a place for teaching to take place that may be thought difficult in other everyday circumstances precisely because teaching about developmental and sexual matters is personal. " These classes would provide students with the correct name of the major parts of the human body responsible for human reproduction. Also an effective sexual education program in school can help students learn about puberty and prepare them for the very important developmental changes which occur as a result of it. Additionally it would teach students about growth and contraception and introduce concepts about human reproduction and the role it play in the life cycle. Sex education may also attempt to prevent children from experiencing abuse. It is very probable that most of the abuse including sexual abuse perpetrated against children, take place not at the hands of strangers but by family members and friends. These classes would help children to be on guard against possible incidences of sexual abuse involving their peers. Additionally it would aid teachers and adults in schools to notice and react appropriately to evidence of abuse. Another reason why sexual education classes should be implemented in schools is that it would allow students to be better informed about human sexuality and its sometimes harsh realities.

The goal of these classes is not to frighten the children but to create in them an awareness of the dangers they may face. Most children are exposed to sexual stimuli by means of their peers, the media and music in their general environment. These stimuli however give distorted views of human sexuality. Rhoda Reddock noted that " In the absence of structured sexuality and sex information in schools, young people are plagued by persistently dangerous and life-threatening behaviour." An effective sex education program should help students understand the meaning of sexuality. These classes would provide students with the facts about human sexuality and how to be comfortable with their own. They would learn about the influences of their behaviour, and how to evaluate these influences in light of the consequences it may incur. They need to be made aware of the dangers of having unprotected sex. There are those who advocate the abstinence only program being taught in schools, but these programs are dangerous, ineffective and inaccurate. There is a great amount of ignorance surrounding sexual issues. Sexual education is an important part of improving Trinidad and Tobago's educational schooling. Implementing effective sexual education programs offers positive benefits to both students and the community by providing children with accurate information that will result in well-informed decision-making. Additionally sexual education classes could help to reduce promiscuity among teens in Trinidad and Tobago. Sexual behaviour has become a serious challenge in the society in some schools because pupils are having sex in the classroom in full view of other pupils. It is a fact that teenagers are going to engage in sex regardless of what anyone says or does. There are several studies that show the average age of the first sexual encounter is fourteen in Trinidad and Tobago, with more than seventy five

per cent of teenagers becoming sexually active by the age of sixteen. These studies also indicate the high prevalence of HIV among young people with girls being six times more likely to have HIV than boys between the ages of fifteen to nineteen. Gopie, R. noted that " two point five per cent of the population in Trinidad and Tobago ages fifteen to forty nine have HIV, but this could be twice as high due to under-reporting. " It is no longer just about unwanted pregnancies but a matter of life and death. There is a serious need for proper sex education programs in our nation's schools. Teenagers need to be adequately informed as to how to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections (STIs). These classes would also help to correct wrong beliefs in myths on human sexuality that still prevail throughout the Caribbean. For example one such myth is that a girl or woman is absolutely safe from getting pregnant if she has sex during menstruation. These myths are misleading and can be detrimental to our nation's youth. School is not only about facts, figures and numbers, it is about living and making choices and our youths are not being thought how to make the right choices. Our nation is failing to protect the most vulnerable in society. The home is failing our youth as well, most parents do not talk about sex with their children. Therefore it is up to the state as the guardian of its citizens to ensure that the future generation is well equipped to negotiate and make the right choices during their teenage years. Sex education can help to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, prevent unwanted pregnancies and help teenagers learn to form responsible views on their own sexual behaviour. These classes support and encourage teenagers in finding their identities. It could help them to have a better awareness about sexuality and also help to promote healthy and informed attitudes. Reference Cummings,

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