



EurECA

European Educators' Christian Association

Position Paper on Sexuality Education

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Introduction

In Europe children have the right to receive sexuality education,¹ and most people today agree on the importance of it, in order to provide young people with the knowledge and skills for developing a proper attitude towards their sexuality and an understanding of healthy and fulfilling ways to live out their sexuality. While different sides can agree upon the importance of sexuality education, there are disagreements regarding the philosophical, theological and thus anthropological views behind sexuality education, which then influence how sexuality education is viewed, which content should be included, the methodology used for teaching it, and educational practice in which it is taught and last but not least who is supposed to teach these important facts of life to our children.

Content

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines sexuality as being “a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction.”² Thus the content of sexuality education WHO encourages is quite broad, including not just healthy practices for sex and the physical aspects of a person; it also includes the development of a young person’s identity. WHO believes sexuality education will help young children gain knowledge and skills for developing a positive attitude towards sexuality, gain knowledge about the physical aspects of their own and the opposite sex, know about healthy sex practices and also understanding of who they are as a person. While sexuality is an important part of life, and the content of the WHO framework for sexuality is something most people will need to deal with at some point in their life, the question remains, when, how and by whom children and young adults are being introduced to these issues.

Purpose of Sexuality Education

The original purpose of sexuality education arose from a needs oriented perspective, after the sexual revolution in the 1960s and 70s. The freedom young people had, brought with it the risk of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and unwanted pregnancies. Thus one of the main purposes was and still is the prevention of health risks and an understanding of healthy and safe sex practices³.

While the original purpose focused mainly on problem solving, today much of the focus, at least in the western world, has shifted towards a more personal-growth-oriented⁴ perspective, which is to equip young people with the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, to develop good relationships and develop a positive attitude towards their sexuality.

Another purpose is to understand the impact which cultural values and religious beliefs have on an individual’s view of sexuality and gender roles and identity⁵. According to the WHO Standards of education, students are to be enabled to help develop a fair compassionate society, in which there is respect for sexual diversity and gender differences⁶. This sounds very positive, but behind these words is the idea, to move away from religious beliefs and traditional cultural values, especially when it comes to marriage and family.

¹ European Educators’ Christian Association www.eureca-online.org

While from a Christian point of view we can agree upon the purpose in that our students should develop a positive and healthy perspective about their sexuality, their gender roles and identity and they are to learn to value and respect other people and their perspectives; our point of view on human sexuality and thus the way to achieve this purpose will be different in many areas of sexuality education.

Influence of different philosophical, theological, thus anthropological views

Sexual health and activity

The WHO defines sexual health as “a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity”⁷. In order to lead to physical health, sexuality education needs to include accurate information on “growth and development; sexual anatomy and physiology; reproduction; contraception; pregnancy and childbirth; HIV and AIDS; and STIs”⁸. When it comes to physical health aspects and the teaching of anatomy and biology of the human body the content requirements will be nearly the same for people of different views. However, when it comes to the question of which kind of sexual behavior leads to emotional, mental and social well-being, the types of sexuality education programmes will differ.

This difference stems from a different understanding of the purpose of sex. While proponents of today’s sexuality education programmes place pleasure and enjoyment of sex as the prime purpose of sex, there are those of us, who look at God’s purposes for sex. The former believe that having sex, as long as it is safe-sex, leads to emotional well-being. We argue, that emotional well-being and health can only fully be realized, when sex strengthens the bonding of a man and woman in intimacy for life within marriage. And it is designed for the creation of new life⁹. In order for that new life to flourish, it needs a mother and a father, thus healthy sexual acts belong within a committed relationship, out of which new life can flow.

While students are to gain a positive attitude towards sexuality, and to view it as something that, done in its right place, can be enjoyed wholeheartedly, they need to also be informed about implications of early sexual activity, and for their own medical and social well-being, encouraged to defer sexual activity until marriage¹⁰.

Identity development in sexuality education

When it comes to who we are as a person and how we can know who we are, the question goes back to the old discussion – Nature or Nurture. While the discussion about the nature versus nurture aspect seemed to have ended at the beginning of the 2000s¹¹ due to evidence that both aspects have an influence on child development¹², it still seems to be present at the discussion in regards to gender. At one end of the discussion there are those who say that nature or biology has no influence on the gender of a person¹³, at the other end there are those who say that nature¹⁴ or creation¹⁵ plays an important role or the only role on gender.

We believe that Man is created in the image of God as male and female beings¹⁶. Men and Women are of equal value, but they are made to complement each other with their given gender characteristics. A big part of our identity is given, but nurture plays an important part in developing identity as well. Nurture, which is in alignment with the way we have been created, is the best

support a young person can receive in order to develop a healthy view of him- or herself and to enjoy being born male or female¹⁷. The best way to help young people find their identity is to help them with finding their identity within the sex they were born¹⁸.

This does not mean that each male or each female has to be or do the same as any other male or female. Each person has their own characteristics and strengths, and finding these out will be an important aspect of the curriculum content. We acknowledge that within a fallen world, there have been structural influences, which have negatively impacted the way men and women have been viewed and the role each sex has been given throughout history. Seeking to find out what has been distorted and thus needs correction, we endeavor to help children and young people to be confident with who God created them to be, male or female, and to find their right place within society.

While the goal is to help children understand that heterosexuality is the way human beings are created, a Christian sexuality education curriculum will include other gender identities. Great care should be given that children who have difficulties with their given gender identity will be treated with respect and love by the whole school community and find the understanding and help they need. However, there should be no content that would in any way promote confusion in children about the sex they were born with. Gender diversity should be taught as something that exists, in an age appropriate manner and in a way which respects people of diverse gender identities and prohibits any kind of gender based violence.

In order to do that to the best of our ability we need to seek to develop materials that are in alignment with biblical truth and nature, follow current research on child- and identity development, and that will help children know their value and identity and to respect and love others.

Family life and relationship building

We believe that human beings are social beings and have been created for relationships. Mental and emotional health can only be reached and sustained, if people live in good relationships and are able to form strong attachment and trust to others. In order for that to happen children need to live in an environment that is stable, in which they are able to develop trust¹⁹ and strong attachment. While in today's society the reality of many children's experiences is different and some sexuality education programmes support the view that diverse and ever changing family compositions are the way to a fulfilled and good life²⁰, the reality tells us something different²¹. Much of the research data today supports the point, that stable family life, with heterosexual parents, provides children with the best basis for emotional and social development and better health²².

While as a Christian organization, we base our family values on a Judeo-Christian view of life, we do acknowledge, that children come from a diversity of family backgrounds. No matter where children come from, be it stable heterosexual families or any other kind of background, that which is reality in children's lives needs to be included. All students are to feel accepted and loved, and taken seriously in their needs and experiences, but also have the chance to learn that a family of a committed mum and dad bringing up their children, and in caring relationship with the wider family, is not outdated, but is still the best option for their future and the children they will have.

Teaching for relationship building within the context of sexuality education should help students to develop the skills and attitudes for long lasting relationships and a view of marriage and family which is meant for life and built on self-giving love.

Who is responsible for sex education?

Parents are primarily responsible for sexuality education, but they can give this responsibility to others. Schools should only take over parts of the sexuality education, when parents agree with their programme. If parents give permission for sexuality education to be taught in schools, there should be close cooperation with parents and teachers.

Paedagogy of Sexuality Education

Teaching about human sexuality should always be age appropriate and done with a positive attitude towards human sexuality, given as a gift to enjoy, for the purpose of strengthening marriage and of procreation. The manner of teaching should be natural and in a way that makes everyone involved feel safe. While it should be positive towards sexual activity, it should not encourage sexual behaviors but simply provide age-appropriate information, therefore, the programme should be free of sexual practical activities or any pornographic images.

Appendix

Helpful Resources

„Principles Sexual Education“ <https://www.prinzipien-sexualpaedagogik.org/english/basics/>

Developed by a leading European group of experts on sexual and emotional health, the principles are a good framework for developing a sexuality education programme.

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³ WHO p.11

⁴ WHO p.15

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⁶ WHO p.27

⁷ WHO p.17-18

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