

Sex Education in Sweden

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Introduction

- WAS promotes and advocates for sexual health and sexual rights - which include seeking, receiving and acquiring information in relation to sexuality and sex education.
- Long tradition in the Nordic countries of compulsory sex education, whereas Sweden was the first country in the world 1955
- Criticism - focus is too much on sexual risks and prevention instead of sexual pleasure and sexual health
- An on-going process with new societal challenges



Purpose and research questions

The aim is to discuss some of the norms, performances and experiences that are linked to sex education, both from a historical perspective and up to present days:

- What perspectives have dominated the focus of sex education from a historical point of view?
- What is the role of sex education in young people's sexual health nowadays?
- Is sex education geared towards all young people, or are certain groups excluded?
- What values are conveyed by those who teach the adolescents?



A historical perspective

Duality and complexity

- A continuous duality and complexity linked to the western society's view on sexuality
- Antipodes as sexual health on one hand and sexual ill health on the other, risky behavior for one and safe conduct on the other, forbidden and legal, good and bad sex
- Gayle Rubin speaks about an additional variable – the Charmed Circle, which contains good and bad sex
- Sexuality is, according to Foucault, one of the areas that require most regulations, even though sexuality in fact is a phenomenon impossible to define and delimit.



A historical perspective

The first Pioneers

- Large outbreaks of venereal diseases in the 18th century that made demands on sexual prevention and education.
- The Swedish doctor, botanist, geologist and educator **Carl Linnaeus** (1707-1778), the first professor at Uppsala University.
- In the late 19th century the first organized sex education was conducted at girls' schools in Stockholm by the first female physician in Sweden, **Karolina Widerström**.
- **Elise Ottesen-Jensen**, one of the forces behind the establishing of the *Swedish Association for Sexuality Education*, RFSU.



A historical perspective

The 20th century, 1

- In the middle of 20th century a continuous demand for enlightenment and information for everyone increases
- 1955 - Sweden become the first country in the world to determine sex education as compulsory in schools
- Sexuality is seen as an important part of human health, however with an aim of identifying appropriate or inappropriate behavior.
- Critics consider the teacher's guide to be too problem-oriented and sex hostile.



A historical perspective

The 20th century, 2

- In the 1970s, sex education is described as liberal and accepting
- The goal is to "mediate knowledge and attitudes that facilitate good personal relationships that in a deeper sense will lead to a satisfying sexual life".
- In the 1980s, the problem-oriented perspective is once again dominating, largely due to the spread of hiv and aids
- The focus is on "safe sex" and the use of condoms, both in order to protect against unwanted pregnancy and from sexually transmitted diseases.



A historical perspective

The 21th century

- The 21th century is characterized by a more affirmative approach to sexuality and sex education
- A positive framing makes teaching more successful
- Focus on critical norm pedagogy as a way to make the hetero normative postulates visible
- Young people are given responsibility of their own sexuality, based on their needs



Critical perspectives of today

- Today's teaching has too much focus on problematic issues, e.g. sexist language, sexual violence and the continuing lack of sexual equality between the sexes.
- The hetero normative education largely pervades the information to the young generation even nowadays.
- There are groups of young people that seem to be marginalized by having limited or non-existing experiences of sex education



Marginalized groups

- Young people with intellectual disabilities get less access to information about their own bodies, sexuality and relationships
- Young people placed in detention homes, also seems to get limited information
- The national standards of sex education are too general
- The standards are not adapted to the individual variations and different sexual experiences
- A risk of not getting regular sex education while placed at detention homes



Discussion

New challenges for professionals

- Sexual information and counseling on the Internet and via Social media
- Easily accessible pornography
- The younger generation is forcing the adult world to examine their own morality and to change their approach
- The increasing multicultural society whereas contradictory norms of sexuality exist at the same time.
- **Where are the young people's own voices?**



Conclusion

A critical pedagogical approach

- A critical pedagogical approach (CPA) link comprehensive sex education to sexual rights, and helps to review hetero normative values and ideals
- Make sure that the sex educators are well-trained (c.f. WAS suggestion for training standards of sexuality educators).
- CPA focus on different ways of recognizing sexuality as a valued part of life instead of a risk factor.
- CPA might help to develop adapted models for sex education for different kind of youth groups.



THANK YOU!

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