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, 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.

The 21st century

• The 21st 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 heteronormative 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 heteronormative 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 heteronormative 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.
References


