

Ontario's 2016 Sex Education Curriculum

Goldwin Emerson, gandjemerson@rogers.com

The London Free Press, July 28,2018

The full details of the 2016 new Sex Education curriculum can easily be accessed on your computer at *Ontario's 2016 Sex Education Curriculum*. Our new Ontario Premier, Doug Ford, has recently closed down this curriculum and Ontario schools have now reverted to a former 1998 sex education program. Premier Ford has offered to conduct “the largest consultation ever” (The London Free Press ,July 16, page A6) on the matter of sex education for Ontario schools. He has indicated that some modifications to the 1998 sex education curriculum may result from the input of the responses from his proposed widely held consultations.

A good starting point in forming your own opinions about what is appropriate and what is not will be to familiarize yourself with the recently canceled 2016 sex education curriculum. You will find the contents of the new 2016 curriculum from grades 1 through to grade 12 as listed above. The full details of the 2016 curriculum are too numerous to be listed here. The following comments are meant as a brief introduction.

There are four main categories set out for each grade: Living Skills, Active Living, Movement Competence, and Healthy Living. In each grade from grade 1 to grade 12 it is the last category, Healthy Living, which contains most of the sex knowledge set out according to the age level and comprehension of the students. In total, the overall curriculum deals with areas of health such as eating healthy foods, having balanced diets, communicating with other students, engaging in good physical exercise, healthy hygiene, using proper skills in making good choices, and finding the right strategies for setting personal limits and saying “no” to unwise choices. In total, the sex education component for the entire new curriculum makes up about 10% of the health curriculum while other skills in healthy living, making friends, dealing with stress, involvement in sports and exercise, social skills, building self- confidence, and respect for those who are from different ethnic origins make up the majority of the new curriculum.

As an example of the sex component in grade 1, students will learn about one’s body development, some visible and invisible differences between females and males, and learning proper acceptable names for various body parts including sex organs. In grade 5 students will learn about the reproductive system, menstruation and sperm production, hygienic factors for good body health, and strategies for avoiding pressures to act or behave in an unsafe manner.

Grade 9 students will learn about the dangers of using illicit drugs, making good decisions, preventing pregnancy, and also preventing homophobia. The meaning of sexual consent and setting safe personal boundaries or limits for healthy behavior are included.

In grade 12, students will include discussions about communicating with partners, developing conflict resolutions, and communicating ideas and settling disputes in a respectful and effective manner.

Admittedly, this abbreviated description of the Sex Education Curriculum is only enough to give readers a quick overview of the general directions and aims of the curriculum. I hope those who are interested will read a more complete description which can be found on your computer under the *Ontario 2016 Sex Education Curriculum*.

There are some recurring public criticisms of the curriculum. As a former teacher of teachers, I would like to address a few of these. Some parents wish the schools would leave the matter of sex education entirely up to parents. My response is that in many cases leaving it up to parents may mean leaving these topics undone since many parents will also leave the topic of sex education untaught. This approach can result in a hit and miss method of sex education. However, for parents who are really interested and competent, I think teachers would and should welcome parental input.

Some critics say grade 1 is too young for learning correct terms for parts of the body. I think that children at a very young age will have names for sex organs whether they come from crude street level language or more acceptable and respectful terms within the new curriculum. Some parents have argued, and I think correctly, that there is a lot more to healthy sex than physical attraction. In some cases, parents encourage children to discuss issues on sex and give proper guidance for their children's behavior. I don't believe that teachers would or should object to parental guidance in these matters. Moreover, the new curriculum also addresses the importance for children to be respectful, caring, knowledgeable, and concerned about sex beyond simple physical matters.

It was approximately 20 years ago since the previous curriculum was developed. Children now have easy access to cell phones, iPads, personal computers and other means of communicating with their peers. Either they will be taught at school about sex or in many cases they will be left to follow the information and misinformation of their peers. Since children now emerge into puberty at a younger age than previously, it is appropriate that sex education courses introduce their instructions and information at earlier ages than the previous 1998 sex education curriculum.

On balance, I welcome the new 2016 Ontario Sex Education Curriculum and I am sorry to see its demise.