Comprehensive Sex Education Program

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In all situations and problems, the best solutions are always the ones that are holistic and the ones guided by an open-minded attitude or philosophy. Problems relating to sex are no different. Engaging in sex outside marriage and in various contexts can cause various problems and issues ranging from the medical to the psychological. To combat these problems such as premarital sex, AIDS and STDs or STIs, it is therefore necessary to rework the present sex education program which focuses on abstinence until marriage and opt for a more comprehensive program that takes as many possibilities and factors into consideration. While abstinence seems to be the most obvious solution it is never enough and in fact, as proven by studies and researches, can even lead to unprecedented negative outcomes or consequences. Because it is too narrow and too focused, abstinence-only-until-marriage program wrongly assumes that once the program supports abstinence, young people are likely to abstain from sex before or until marriage. Comprehensive sex education recognizes the failure or limitations of the abstinence only sex education program as it offers a more broad program that provides adequate, right, and appropriate information about sex; assumes open-minded approach to sex; bases assumptions on science and medicine; avoids discrimination based on sex, age, gender, etc. by considering differences; encourages dialogue and provides counseling and support.

SIECUS (Sexuality Information & Education Council of the United States) defines comprehensive sex education as a program which *“respects the diversity of values and beliefs represented in the community and will complement and augment the sexuality education children receive from their families*” (qtd. in Collins, Alagiri & Summers, 2002, p. 13). The main component of comprehensive sex education is that it promotes both abstinence and contraception (Huberman, 2002, n.p.). This comes from recognizing that sex is part of everyone’s life regardless of age, class, and gender. To advocate plain abstinence is therefore not enough to control premarital sex, AIDS and STDs because there is no guarantee that adolescents would abstain from sex before marriage or that young homosexuals would refrain from engaging in sex with multiple partners. Fulfilling what abstinence only programs cannot accomplish, comprehensive sex education aims to bring down the statistics on teen pregnancy, AIDS, and STD’s by teaching safe sex practices (Cahill & Jones, 2001, p. 1) which includes the use of contraceptives and condoms alongside the principle of abstinence. The core values which comprehensive sex education promotes are honesty, respect, choice, individuality, freewill, safety, responsibility, tolerance, and truth (Collins et al., p. 12).

Abstinence only sex education advocates abstaining from sexual intercourse before marriage and living a monogamous lifestyle. It is funded by the Personal Responsibility Act of 1996 (Cahill & Jones, 2001, p. 1) and it aims to decrease out of wedlock pregnancies just like CSE or Comprehensive Sex Education except that it remains doubtful and unaccepting of the use of oral contraceptives and condoms among young people on the reason that by doing so, encourages teenagers to engage in premarital sex. This makes abstinence only sex education programs highly traditional and conservative. The conservatism arises or is borne by the belief that the only proper and right context for sex is marriage, any sexual activity outside it is considered wrong, unhealthy, and immoral (Collins, et al., 2002, p. 1). Immediate and long-term negative consequences can result from teen sex which can range from the psychological to the physical. Physically, there is the possibility of sexually transmitted diseases and psychologically, there is shame, guilt, and remorse (Cahill & Jones, p. 1). In addition, abstinence only programs provide only one solution to the complex problem of teen pregnancy and that is abstinence. Because of this restrictiveness, many critics are unanimous in proclaiming abstinence only sex education as ineffective (Donenberg et al., n.d., p. 1)

The pieces of information which the abstinence only sex education programs do not supply are provided for by the Comprehensive Sex Education program. Aside from discussing the benefits of abstinence and the importance of reaching maturity before engaging in sex, Comprehensive Sex Education Program informs the target audience which are the young people about oral contraceptives and condoms- their usage and the role they play in cutting incidences of teenage pregnancy, AIDS, and other sexually transmitted diseases (Collins, et al., 2002, p. 1). It also discusses the medical nature of AIDS and the other common sexually transmitted diseases, providing details on the hows and whys of the diseases, exposing myths along the way so young people could avoid making mistakes. The Comprehensive program also gives out very important research statistics or data to set their claims and assumptions which in turn help convince adolescents from being sexually impulsive at an early age. Taboo subjects are also present in the curricula which are usually avoided and considered non-topics in abstinence only programs such as abortion and homosexuality (Collins et al, p. 3). Aside from being extensive, adequate, and accurate, information provided for by the Comprehensive program are age-appropriate “based on physical, emotional, and social developmental stages” (Huberman, 2002, n.p.).

Because the comprehensive program recognizes that teenagers have a mind of their own, it does not limit the curricula to a single line of solution. Although abstinence remains a part of the program, other choices are also being raised such as the use of contraceptives in recognition of the reality that there will always be teenagers who would engage in sex before marriage. In fact, according to the APA Committee on Psychology Report (Donenberg, et al., n.d., p. 1), one in five teenagers are likely to engage in sex before turning 15. Presenting them the choice of contraceptives prevents teen pregnancy and the acquisition of AIDS which according to Collins and his colleagues (2002) occur annually in 20,000 young people with ages 25 and below in the US (p. 2). Aside from being open-minded about the possibility of teenagers being sexually active, the Comprehensive program also accounts for homosexual sex and the reality of incest, rape, and other forms of sexual abuse (Huberman, 2002, n.p.). Even abortion is being openly discussed in the program in recognition of the fact that as many as 39% of teenagers, according to a national survey, wants information about abortion (Collins, et al., p. 3).

By taking into account that each young individual is different since each has his or her own set of values shaped by a distinct or unique culture or background, Comprehensive sex education program avoids making distinction based on any known criteria. Free from biases and prejudices, the program targets all sorts of young people “*including youth of color, gay and lesbian adolescents, adolescents exploring same-sex relationship, drug-users, adolescent offenders, school drop-out, runaways, mentally-ill, homeless and migrant adolescents*” (Donenberg et. al, p. 2). While abstinence only programs have the tendency to isolate and stigmatize homosexual youths which according to Cahill & Jones (2001) have negative impact on the overall well-being of homosexual adolescents (p. 3), comprehensive program tries its best to accommodate the issues and concerns of gays and lesbians on sex and sexuality.

Comprehensive program acknowledges that sex is both a pleasure and a responsibility (Huberman, 2002, n.p.) thus the open-minded approach to sex education. This is where it differs fundamentally from abstinence only programs for while the second emphasizes sex as a responsibility, comprehensive sex program does not forget the all important component of sex which is pleasure. Second, comprehensive sex education program assumes that sex or the decision to engage in sex is influenced by several factors such as “media, family, peers, religion, and personal experiences” (Huberman). This is confirmed by the studies done by Dr. Douglas Kirby which proves that teenage sex or sexual behavior is a complex jumble of factors (Collins et al., 2002, p. 8) and which the comprehensive sex education program then incorporates into its curricula.

Not wanting to isolate adolescents and even the parents, the Comprehensive program encourages healthy and open communication between the educators and the adolescents as well their parents (Huberman, 2002, n.p.). No topics or questions are ever sensitive or shameful enough not to be discussed. While open communication is the norm between educators and the adolescents, the comprehensive program also encourages this type of communication between the adolescents and their parents. Apart from effective communication, another component which makes comprehensive program the best sex education program in comparison with abstinence only program is that it provides counseling and support services for adolescents. Although majority of the counseling is preventive, the program also offers counseling to those who have contracted AIDS or STDs and those who have become pregnant by incest, rape or any other kind of sexual abuse (Huberman).

Comprehensive Sex Education program remains the best sex education program, all things considered. While it promotes abstinence as the main solution to decreasing the number of teen pregnancy and the incidences of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, the comprehensive program, recognizing the difficulty of sexuality or sexual behavior among adolescents, offers other alternative solutions such as the use of birth control. Improving the abstinence only program, the comprehensive program adopts a more encompassing approach which means providing information that is accurate, medically sound, adequate, and age-appropriate; being more tolerant and accepting of others; making the right and reasonable claims about sex and encouraging teenagers to speak up and ask questions from their educators and parents. With abundant research works and studies proving that Comprehensive Sex Education is the best sex education program there is, abstinence only programs should be upgraded and given an overhaul with holism and comprehensiveness as its end goal.

References

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