

SEX EDUCATION AN URGENT NEED EVERYWHERE

- A SERIOUS PROBLEM WHICH CONFRONTS MODERN SOCIETY EVERYWHERE IS THAT OF EXPLOITING SEX FOR COMMERCIAL PURPOSES, BY OVEREMPHASIZING ITS ROLE IN PEOPLE'S LIVES.
- EDUCATORS AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD MOBILIZE THEIR EFFORTS TO FIGHT THIS WAVE AND PREVENT THE USE OF MASS MEDIA FOR DISTORTED SEXUAL INFORMATION.

In 1975, the Western Hemisphere Region of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, anxious to enlarge its services to reach the entire population of Latin America, and seeing the general need for sex education, adopted a vigorous policy for it. In carrying out this policy, the Federation obtained the generous support of the Kellogg Foundation.

A Technical Commission of experts was formed, grouping individuals who had experienced conditions of sex education in Latin America and had acquired a wide experience in their own countries and beyond their national frontiers. The findings of this commission have been published in a report which is here condensed for the benefit of all those interested in the topic and particularly those who feel the need of sex education programmes in schools and elsewhere.

The subject raises a large number of problems which will be mentioned below. From an educational point of view, two concrete manifestations of those problems are a source of concern to educators:

a) An ever-earlier start of sexual activity among adolescents, possibly resulting in disturbing consequences for their personal, family and social lives.

b) The influence of mass media, every day more powerful and apparently uncontrollable, directed toward a commercialized exaltation of sexuality, (and an important contributory factor to the individual's alienation from an oppressive consumer society).

The study carried out by the Commission showed the absence of sex education from the traditional curricula of general education. When some effort has been made to give sex education, this has been fragmentary and unsystematic, involving an inadequate conception of it, giving excessive emphasis to the biological aspects of sex, limiting its objectives and content to information, with little or no emphasis on the formative educational aspects of the subject.

What is sex education?

Without trying to reduce sex education to a single definition, which seems impossible, we consider it important to outline the dimensions of the area as a whole:

Sex education is concerned with the individual as a subject of inter-personal relations.

Sex education concerns itself with the process of human development; at each stage of his life, man's personality is influenced by the interaction of psychological, biological and social phenomena.

Sex education is a part of general education. It will contribute qualitatively to the development of well-balanced individuals, adjusted to their social and sexual inter-personal relationships, and quantitatively to the formation of well-balanced families, thus underlining the clear link between sex education and responsible parenthood.

Stages of Development

The process leading to the development of sex education in any country usually passes through the following stages:

1. Perception

This involves the existence of individuals who perceive the need for sex education.

2. Association

"Private groups are created at this stage, which establish more or less organized networks, and whose effectiveness depends on the professional competence and joint power of their members."⁽¹⁾

3. Awareness

"Awareness is a state of individual and public consciousness of the need for sex education in a given community."⁽²⁾ At this stage, the following needs arise:

Information and motivation of leaders.

Training of those agents of change who come in direct contact with the community.

Motivation and awareness of those in charge of all mass media.

4. Implementation

This involves the setting up of pilot projects and

(1) & (2) quoted from the study mentioned at the end of this article.

experimental programmes which can be carried out by official and private bodies. The following areas are particularly important:

- Training of personnel at all levels.
- Evaluation and follow-up of the programme.
- Development of educational material.

5. Official Acceptance

A favorable attitude of the authorities toward sex education will facilitate the setting up of study groups or committees which may establish contact with official bodies at both national and international levels. They may also form mixed commissions for the development of curricula, programmes, standards, laws and regulations, with the result of obtaining acceptance and exercise of responsibility at official levels.

6. Consolidation

"Following gradual official acceptance, during which existing needs, interests and human resources have been assessed, sex education should be implemented in the country concerned through all available channels." For this purpose the following requirements must be fulfilled:

Training future professionals.

The content of courses given should not be limited to anatomy and physiology but should include psychology, anthropology and other related areas.

Use of combined educational media: radio, printed material, personal contact.

Extension of the programmes to all levels of formal education: primary, secondary and higher education, complemented by programmes of non-formal education.

Integration of sex education in the general curriculum.

Continuous training in sex education of teachers through refresher courses at all levels.

Constant collaboration and inter-disciplinary cooperation of official and private bodies.

7. Research

Research must be directed primarily towards identifying the real needs and problems as lived and felt by the individuals and recipients of the programme.

Basic studies on sexuality:

- Attitudes and knowledge related to sex.
- Sexual roles and socialization.
- Sexual dysfunctions.

Social problems which, in part, may be a product of sexual problems are: prostitution, venereal diseases, broken homes, induced abortion, unwanted pregnancies, illegitimate births, adolescent pregnancy, etc.

Because sex education should be provided on an integrated and continuous basis throughout the individual's life, it will be necessary to find practical ways of incorporating it into existing formal and non-formal general education programmes.

In establishing objectives priority should be given, through integration into other community development programmes, to rural and marginal populations, among which we find the highest incidence of the sexual pathology described in the section on "Research".

(Condensed from "A study by an Expert Commission convened by IPPF/WH, "N.Y. 1976)