

Progressive Sexuality Education: Suited to the Australian Public?

Associate Professor Mary Lou Rasmussen,
Faculty of Education, Monash University
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3 Types of Sexuality Education- All teach abstinence from sexual activity as a healthy choice for teens

- **Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)** - addresses wide-ranging information on sexual health, contraceptives and sexual activity, and relationships
- **Abstinence-Based** (sometimes called Abstinence-Plus) education -programs contain some information on contraceptives
- **Abstinence-Only** - does not provide contraceptive information, except in terms of failure rates and dangerous side effects. It teaches teens that all premarital sexual activity, for both teens and adults and including most premarital sexual acts in addition to intercourse, are unhealthy physically and psychologically.

Gayle Rubin, in concluding her article *Thinking Sex* writes that:

Those who consider themselves progressive need to examine their preconceptions, update their sexual educations... (Rubin, 1989:310)

Tiffany Jones, ARCSHS, 2012

...progressive sexuality education messages in classrooms address homophobia, sexual autonomy, sexual experimentation and even 'heterosexual' information

Central High is located in inner suburban Melbourne, in an area that has experienced high levels of gentrification. The school has a highly sought after gifted and talented program, strong international links as well as music and drama programs. The school also celebrates Rainbow Day each year - there are lots of pro-gay posters around the school. ABS data demonstrate that forty percent of students in this community come from families that list them as having no religion, while 40% come from Christian backgrounds (predominantly Catholic and Eastern Orthodox). This is significantly above the Australian average, which reports that 31% of students in high schools are listed as having no religion. Central High Participants were 5 males and one female. Only one male identified as religious - he listed his religion as Buddhist (three of the participants were Anglo, one male was Thai-Australian and one male was of African ancestry).

See http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102_0Main+Features30Nov+2013#religionandschool.

MLR: So do you think that [arranged marriage] should be covered in sexuality education as well...?

Daniel - Central High: It doesn't have much to do with sexuality really. Yeah I would say it's more of a humanities subject, it's someone's rights, it's for a law subject, I wouldn't say it has as much to do with this because there are all sorts of things you could, like I don't think it's really that relevant, no...I think technically it could be touched on, sexual education, but as a main topic it seems to suit better in something like humanities.

This data is drawn in part of a research project lead by Rasmussen entitled *Sex Education in Australia and New Zealand: Responding to religious and cultural difference*. DP110101173.

- **MLR:** Why are you making that distinction?

- **Daniel:** In my view, I am speaking for all of us here, this isn't really about sort of relationships as such, this is more about sort of cultural and theological and also sort of what decisions what sort of your opinion matters...I think a lot more could be learnt and understood about these issues if they were addressed as cultural issues and social issues rather than a sexual issue.

Saba Mahmood – The Politics of Piety

- ...with the appearance of religion outside of the private space of individualized belief. For those with well-honed secular-liberal and progressive sensibilities, the slightest eruption of religion into the public domain is frequently experienced as a dangerous affront, one that threatens to subject us to normative morality dictated by mullahs and priests. This fear is accompanied by a deep self-assurance about the truth of the progressive-secular imaginary, one that assumes that the life forms it offers are the best way out for these unenlightened souls, mired as they are in spectral hopes that gods and prophets hold out to them. (2005: xi)

Progressive Sexuality Education: Preconceptions

1. Sexuality education is optimal when it is underpinned by rigorous scientific research and rational debate.
2. Sexuality education needs to promote sexual autonomy in order to ensure that young people are able to act as autonomous sexual subjects.

Progressive Sexuality Education: Preconceptions

3. Sexuality education is responsible for the cultivation of tolerance of sexual and gender diversity; and,
4. Sexuality education in public education precludes discussion of the intersections between faith, religion and morality (such conversations should happen in private settings family, church, mosque, temple).

Butler, J. Habermas, J. Taylor, C. & West, C. (2011). *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*

...moving forward has to be distinguished from progress...What cannot be brought forward? What is left behind? There's always something left behind, especially in aggressive notions of progress that hold out the promise of final redemption. (Butler, 104 in Mendieta and Van Antwerpen, 2011)

Back to Central High – concluding comments in focus group

Dirk: I would be very happy, I would quite like to do more cultural stuff, I was saying before that this forced marriage wouldn't fit in to what we do at the moment at all, as it's completely different train of thinking, but if they are re-writing the curriculum I think we should definitely have some more in-depth cultural analysis of issues.

Daniel: Yes, cultural issues.

Arthur: And just rather [than] learning that this is ok and this is bad and just have more discussion have a look at it from these sort of perspectives

James: Yeah how sex is viewed from different cultures and different people.