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Sex Education and its Positioning in the Educational Process

Edukacja seksualna i jej miejsce
w procesie edukacyjnym

KEYWORDS ABSTRACT

sex education,
primary education,
marriage, parent-
hood, family

This article concerns sex education and its place in contemporary society and in education. We discuss the role currently played by the family in the Slovak Republic in bringing up children so as to prepare them for marriage, parenthood and sexual good health. However, practice and research have shown that not every family is adequately prepared for fulfilling this function. The results of demographic, sociological and psychological research highlight an increasing rate of divorce (especially amongst young marriages), a lack of preparedness on the part of young marital partners, a lack of any basic ethical approach to intimate relations, and, last but not least, an astonishingly laid-back approach to their own health. The topic of sex education is also defined in the context of the primary-level marriage and parenthood curriculum in the Slovak Republic (1998), in order to guide students towards a basic knowledge of, and responsible attitude towards, partnership and parenthood, in line with both scientific knowledge and ethical standards. The contents of a primary-level education in respect of marriage and parenthood also include the topic of education in the family, the principles of healthy living, gender equality, the creation and development of human beings, and also the

changes in the body of a child in puberty. However, it is always necessary to supplement the lack of information on sexual health in Slovak primary schools, and to develop the social skills of students in order to better prepare them for family life, which is surely no less important than professional training or the life of the individual in society.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE ABSTRAKT

wychowanie seksualne, edukacja seksualna, wczesna edukacja, rodzina, rodzicielstwo, małżeństwo

Istotą artykułu jest określenie miejsca i znaczenia wychowania seksualnego we współczesnym społeczeństwie i procesie wczesnej edukacji dziecka. Podjęto w nim dyskurs na temat wychowania do życia w rodzinie, roli rodzicielstwa i małżeństwa oraz zadań, metod i problemów wychowania seksualnego. Analiza badań empirycznych oraz praktyka edukacyjna wskazują, że nie wszystkie rodziny słowackie są dostatecznie przygotowane do pełnienia tej funkcji. Rodzice nie uświadamiają dzieci, nie poruszają trudnych zagadnień, bojąc się wnikać w głąb problematyki oraz wypełniania tego obowiązku rodzicielskiego. Tematyka wychowania seksualnego i edukacji seksualnej wchodzi w strukturę obowiązującego na Słowacji programu nauczania dla szkół podstawowych. Jej celem jest wyposażenie uczniów w podstawową wiedzę o seksualności w perspektywie biologicznej, psychologicznej i społecznej, dostarczanie informacji na temat planowania rodziny, przygotowanie do dojrzałego rodzicielstwa, uświadomienie celu i sensu seksualności jednostki, identyfikacji i tożsamości płciowej, uwzględnienie różnic indywidualnych, kulturowych i światopoglądowych. Treści kształcenia ukazują seksualność jako pozytywną wartość, dotyczą zdrowego trybu życia, równości płci, poznania typowych problemów i zagrożeń okresu dojrzewania, miłości i jej zagrożeń, ról partnerskich, współpracy z rodzicami, nauczycielami i specjalistami, rozwiązywanie konfliktów i budowania relacji przyjaznych i uczuciowych. Realizacja tych treści wiąże się z uzupełnianiem o nowe, przygotowujące uczniów do życia w rodzinie, rozwijające ich indywidualne umiejętności interpersonalne, kulturowe i społeczne.

Introduction

Research shows that family and marriage feature prominently amongst the evaluative priorities of young people and adults. However, many young people lack the will and ability to resist the temptations of our contemporary era. They also lack the information and social skills needed to actually implement the values they espouse, making them a basis for their lives so that they become a source of self-fulfilment and personal happiness for them. Both young people and adults need help in being brought to

realize that preparation for family life is no less important than preparation for one's occupation. A fundamental part of that preparation is managing one's own sexuality in such way that it "enriches one's personality, improves one's relationships with other people, and develops one's ability to love", as the definition of sexual health goes.

The results of demographic, sociological and psychological surveys warn of an increasing rate of divorce (especially in younger marriages), of the unpreparedness of young partners for marriage and cohabitation, an absence of elementary ethical attitudes towards intimate relations, and, last but not least, a startlingly careless attitude towards their own health. The role of the family in the marital, parental and sexual education of children and young people is paramount, yet both experience and research show that not every family is sufficiently prepared for this function.

The topic of sex education in the Slovak republic really resonated with the public during the preparation and execution of a referendum about the family in 2015. One of the three questions put to voters related specifically to this: "Do you agree with the fact that schools cannot ask children to attend classes concerned with sexual behaviour or euthanasia, if their parents or the children themselves do not agree with the content of such a class?"¹. Positive answers were given by 90.32% of respondents, negative ones by 7.34%, while 2.33% were ruled out as invalid². The results demonstrate that parents wish to participate in decisions about the content of "sex education" in schools. Given that the overall attendance of legitimate voters was 21.41%³, the referendum could not be considered valid, as it was not engaged in by an absolute majority of legitimate voters; the results are thus considered irrelevant. However, according to a survey by the FOCUS agency, held at the end of January 2015, 70% of respondents consider sex education beneficial, while 23% of respondents regard it as damaging⁴.

Sex education as an element in marital and parental education

Currently, the subject of sex education is not a part of the curriculum. The topic can be taught as part of ethics or biology, or of courses in civic or domestic life-skills. In the past, there existed a formally recognized subject-area called *marital and parental educa-*

¹ Government Resolution no. 390 from 04/06/1996, Slovak Republic (1996). *Concept of Education towards Marriage and Parenthood*.

² Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2015). *Interim results of the referendum in Slovakia 2015*. Retrieved from <http://volbysr.sk/sk/tab01.html> (access on: 30.10.2015).

³ J. Debnar, *The results of the referendum on Family 2015*. Retrieved from <https://dennikn.sk/43529/vysledky-referenda-o-rodine-2015/> (access on: 30.10.2015).

⁴ R. Cuprik, Z. Matkovska, *Sexual education is important, as the Focus' research showed for SME*. Retrieved from <http://domov.sme.sk/c/7619162/sexualna-vychova-je-dolezita-ukazal-prieskum-focusu-pre-sme.html> (access on: 30.10.2015).

tion, which was, nevertheless, optional. In line with the currently updated national educational programme for primary education, marital and parental education counts as a formally defined subject-area. Every school has a coordinator for marital and parental education, who is responsible for creating the curriculum for a given level of education. Nevertheless, the integration and implementation of this subject-area in the context of other subjects is not guaranteed. Gehreroва claims that whether, and how far, it will actually be included into the curriculum, depends on the particular teacher and coordinator. Compulsory subjects, such as biology or civic education, can include topics such as contraception, the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, or the physiological and psychological risks associated with having multiple sexual partners. These topics are usually only addressed in the form of discussions or lectures⁵.

The scope of the definitions of the expressions ‘sex education’ and ‘marital and parental education’ are not identical. ‘Marital and parental education’ is understood as the broader term, and ‘sex education’ as just a subdivision of this.

The aim of marital and parental education is that of “constructing basic knowledge and responsible outlooks in the area of partnerships and parenthood in compliance with scientific knowledge and ethical norms”⁶. It does not count as an individual subject, yet it does have its own compulsory curriculum. It is understood as a modular form of education: i.e. its individual parts are defined in various curriculums, and are to be taught according to their suitability and as needed, within several subject areas. It up to each and every teacher to decide when and how, and within what range, its tasks and aims should be carried out.

Sexual education belongs within the curriculum of marital and parental education, but has its own delimitation. It is an open communication between the teacher and students, based on questions put by male and female students about their sexuality and their needs. It is directed towards attaining a deeper knowledge and understanding of, respectively, the areas of sexuality, partnerships, and their consequences for people’s lives; it is also a guide to living a healthier and more fulfilled life of intimacy with one’s partner⁷.

Porter emphasizes the following in sexual education: providing opportunities to acquire information and facts, understanding their significance for life, learning to look actively for sources of information and professional services in cases of need,

⁵ R. Gehreroва, *What do children learn about sex at schools? Questions and answers*. Retrieved from <https://dennikn.sk/40016/vsetko-co-sa-deti-ucia-v-skolach-o-sexe> (access on: 30.10.2015).

⁶ Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic (1998). *Curriculum of marital and parental education*. Retrieved from http://www2.statpedu.sk/buxus/docs/Pedagogicke_dokumenty/zakladne_skoly/osnovy/UO_Vychova_k_manzelstvu_a_rodicovstvu.pdf (access on: 30.10.2015).

⁷ L. Rovnanova, I. Luksik, L. Luksikova, *Methodological guide to sex education at secondary school within the curriculum of education for marriage and parenthood*. Family Planning Association of 2007. Retrieved from <https://rodicovstvo.wordpress.com/metodiky/metodiky> (access on: 30.10.2015).

helping to foster a sense of personal responsibility for one's actions, for one's own and one's partner's health, and for respecting the feelings and values of others⁸.

The concept of marital and parental education

The necessity and importance of marital and parental education has been acknowledged by the government of the Slovak republic in its own legislation. On 4th June 1996, during its session, the government carried Resolution 389, *The Concept of State Family Policy*, where, in Article C of *The Basic Principles of State Family Policy*, the principles of marital and parental education are set out. Other source materials are *The Complex Programme of AIDS/HIV Prevention in Slovakia*, ratified by the government in Resolution 390/1996, dated 4th June 1996, as well as *The National Programme of Health Support*, ratified in Resolution 659 in November 1991. The concept of marital and parental education stems from the aforementioned materials, and the resulting goals set for the Department of Education have been incorporated into the general conception of marital and parental education adopted by the latter.

The Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic is certainly engaged with this issue. A fundamental document – the Sex Education Curriculum for the primary and secondary levels of elementary schools, and for secondary schools, was ratified in 1994 (4028/94-212 with effect from 1st of September 1994), being later renamed as the Curriculum for Marital and Parental Education. These curricula are modular, and give every teacher the option of operating in that sphere of education proper to their subject-area, according to its own requirements and their own intentions.

In line with the document entitled *The Concept of Marital and Parental Education*⁹, the goals at schools are:... “to raise socially, morally and emotionally mature people, able to act and behave according to ethical norms and values recognized by the given society, in their sexual, marital and family life”. This definitely entails that the conception of marital and parental education is multidisciplinary in character. What this conception implies is that philosophical, sociological, psychological and biological aspects of our knowledge about marriage, family life and intimate relationships all need to be integrated. It incorporates all of these, comprising the following goals and aspects:

- self-realisation as preparation for marriage and parenthood,
- understanding of love as the basic element of sexuality, preparation for responsible decision-making and behaviour during critical periods of psychosexual development, based on broadly defined moral values,

⁸ M. Porter, *Sex Education in the UK*, „Choices”, 25 (1996)2, pp. 4-6.

⁹ Government Resolution no. 390 from 04/06/1996, Slovak Republic (1996). *Concept of Education towards Marriage and Parenthood*, p. 2.

- helping children and young people to develop tolerance, responsibility and respect,
- contributing to knowledge about sexual aspects of our lives,
- obtaining and assimilating facts from the field of physiology, pertaining to the anatomy of the reproductive organs, and to reproduction and sexual health, including about contraception and the prevention of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases,
- resisting negative environmental influences (mass media, offers of premature sexual involvement, drugs).

It is necessary to distinguish three basic areas within the educational process pertaining to marital and parental matters: the cognitive sphere, which rests on one's understanding and obtaining a certain amount of information, the emotional one, characterized by acceptance and fostering of particular opinions and attitudes, and the volitive one, manifested in actions and behaviour. All three areas intersect in the process of teaching marital and parental education, but the volitive is the most important. The aim of a marital and parental education is to achieve an outcome where students, given their knowledge and their hierarchy of values, will have acted and behaved in compliance with moral principles, managed to resist negative influences from the environment, and managed to build harmonious relationships based on love, respect, loyalty, tolerance and responsibility, as well as becoming responsible and caring parents.

Curriculum for marital and parental education

In the curriculum of marital and parental education for primary schools¹⁰, it is stated that marital and parental education aims to foster basic knowledge and responsible attitudes in the sphere of partnerships and parenthood, in accordance with scientific knowledge and ethical norms. It is possible to pursue this intention through the fulfilment of the following aims:

- to develop students' sense of responsibility for themselves and others, so that they are better equipped to take responsibility for their own actions,
- to help students develop a positive sense of self-confidence and self-respect,
- to encourage the ability to pursue choices that reflect proper decision-making outcomes, even in the face of negative pressure (assertiveness),

¹⁰ Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic (1998). *Curriculum of marital and parental education*. Retrieved from http://www2.statpedu.sk/buxus/docs/Pedagogicke_dokumenty/zakladne_skoly/osnovy/UO_Vychova_k_manželstvu_a_rodicovstvu.pdf (access on: 30.10.2015).

- to form social skills in interactions with others: create and manage relationships, reveal and solve problems, formulate ideas clearly and aptly, listen to the opinions of others in discussions,
- to show students how to properly ensure their own personal safety, including differentiating between appropriate and illegal forms of bodily contact,
- to lead students towards a gradual realization and adoption of their proper sexual role, with respect to social and moral norms of mutual behaviour,
- to emphasize the significance of friendship, which helps to develop interpersonal relationships,
- empathy, communication skills,
- to nurture the desire to have a family, to have children and bring them up in a loving manner,
- to form attitudes towards safe conduct in relation to health, especially concerning the prevention of AIDS,
- to familiarize students with the negative effects of smoking, alcohol, and other drugs, on the health and behaviour of individuals,
- to provide students with primary information about what is involved in the creation and development of an individual human life, including parental caring for a baby (nourishment and nursing),
- to provide students with basic knowledge about biological, emotional and social changes during puberty.

The marital and parental education offered at the first level in primary schools comprises the following issues: raising a child in a family, principles for a healthy life, the negative effects of smoking, alcohol and other drugs on health and behaviour, the equality of the sexes, the creation and development of the individual, physical changes in children during puberty.

Implementation of marital and parental education within the curriculum of individual subjects at the primary level

Currently, the model of school management works on two levels: that of the national educational programme, and that of a particular school's educational programme. The national educational programme is, hierarchically, the highest-level at which a national project for education is set out. It is issued and published by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic. It represents the first, entirely general level of a model for school management, expressing the main principles and goals of the educational policy. It determines the general aims of schools, in the form of key competences, and establishes a basic division into subject-areas. It also determines the general content of the education (70%). It is a document with binding consequences when it comes to creating the individual educational programs of schools (30%).

The school educational programme is a basic document for any given school, determining education at that school. It is issued by the headmaster, after discussions with a pedagogical committee and the school committee, and is approved by the school founder in writing. It must be designed in accordance with school regulations, and in accordance with the corresponding national educational programme and the principles governing its creation. It grants the school a certain scope for creating some of its pedagogical content (30%) – amounting to a degree of freedom, allowing it to meet specific regional and local conditions and demands.

Conclusion

The national educational programme contains marital and parental education as one of its eight subject-area topics. These topics are a useful instrument for influencing and forming opinions, system of values and the behaviour of students. Such topics, with their content and orientation, have a bearing on the delimited scope of other aspects of education, complementing them, interconnecting both with their contents and also with currently unfolding events in society, and with the everyday experiences of students and of a particular class. In this sense, these topics can exercise a positive influence on the process of creating and developing the functional competences of students. They can be pursued as a part of the curriculum of school subjects, or as independent projects, seminars, educational blocks, courses, etc. Moreover, they can, at the same time, constitute an independent subject within the group of optional lessons offered. (Both forms can be freely combined.) The efficacy of such topics can also be heightened, by having them run concurrently with relevant out-of-school activities¹¹.

According to Rovnanova¹², marital and parental education can be carried out in the following forms: as a non-compulsory or optional subject in non-reforming years, as a hobby club within the framework of a special-interests education, as an optional subject within the framework of the educational programme offered by a given school, corresponding to periods of the timetable with no preassigned content, as an independent subject within the framework of the curriculum of the school's educational programme, having a minimal allocation of 0.5 lessons per

¹¹ Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic (2015). *National education program for primary education*. Retrieved from <https://www.minedu.sk/data/att/7502.pdf> (access on: 30.10.2015).

¹² L. Rovnanova, *Education for marriage and parenthood in the context of school reform*, Banská Bystrica 2010; Matej Bel University. Retrieved from: https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fsexualnavychova.files.wordpress.com%2F2009%2F04%2Fsexuality_2010_novaverzia.ppt (access on: 30.10.2015).

week (amounting to 16 lessons per year), as part of a course of ethical and religious education, during classes devoted to other subject-area topics, depending on the needs and options relevant to the school in question, and within the framework of activities conducted by more specialized school employees (psycho-ethical training sessions and courses, etc.). The extent of the implementation of marital and parental education within the wider process of education will depend on the particular school, its students, their parents and their teachers, the specialized employees working there, and the goals stemming from the national and school curriculum programs.

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