Thoughts on the New Ontario Curriculum for Sexual Education

Dear PPC,

You may have heard in the news over the last week some of the protests over the new Ontario curriculum for sexual education.

As always there are multiple ways we can express our concern. The first step should always be to seek clarification. I encourage you to read the curriculum for yourself.

You can find it here: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/health.html

Here you can also see the 1998 curriculum (updated in 2005), and the 2010 proposed curriculum that was set aside due to parental protests, though mostly reintroduced word-for-word in the 2015 version.

Please note that in many ways this curriculum simply continues on from the “accepting schools act” of 2012 (which Christians also objected to when it was introduced http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/acceptingschoolsact ).

Key concerns regarding this curriculum:

1. Lack of parental input. The government argues that they don't seek parental input for science or math curriculum, they consult with education experts. Yet the truth is that changes have been made to these curriculums over the years based on parental feedback. Isn't it clear that in an area like sexuality, where values play such a big part, that parents should be consulted?

2. Erosion of parental rights: while the government makes it sound like you can opt your child out of any teaching you disagree with on religious grounds, in fact, they then turn around and say that you can’t opt them out of “human rights” related teaching (which turns out to be tied into some of the most controversial topics). Then they spread the material out across other subjects in such a way that it is almost impossible to opt out in any case.

3. Gender Identity Theory: Essentially our children are being taught that gender identity ("I am a male/female" is not based on the biological reality, but instead that it is a “social construct.” Children at a very young age, when they are still figuring out their own self-concept are being introduced to the idea that they may or may not actually be the gender they were born to be. This ties directly into:

4. Confusing the idea of what is ‘normal.’ When every possible gender identity, sexual orientation, and family composition is considered ‘normal’ (even when statistically insignificant), the word ‘normal’ begins to lose it’s meaning.

5. Exposure to material that is arguably age-inappropriate. One can argue that children in grade 3 are likely already aware of non-traditional families (2 moms or 2 dads), or that likely by grade 8 students have heard of anal and/or oral sex, but are these appropriate ages to have guided discussion by teachers that these are normal, and in the latter case that while abstinence is ideal, otherwise it is just important to have “safer” sex?

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada has some general suggestions of how you can act:
http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/page.aspx?pid=634

I have divided my review into three sections:

1. Things to celebrate. (Areas of agreement.)
2. Cautions. (Areas of concern, that may or may not be taught well).
3. Objectionable. (Areas most evangelical Christians would likely object to).
1. Things to celebrate:

*Introductory material:*

Pg 13
“Parents are the primary educators of their children with respect to learning about values, appropriate behaviour, and ethnocultural, spiritual, and personal beliefs and traditions, and they are their children’s first role models. It is therefore important for schools and parents to work together to ensure that home and school provide a mutually supportive framework for young people’s education.”

Pg. 16
“As part of effective teaching practice, teachers communicate with parents about what their children are learning. This communication occurs through the sharing of outlines of learning, ongoing formal and informal conversations, curriculum events, and other means of regular communication, such as newsletters, website postings and blogs.”

Pg. 17
Timetables should have sufficient flexibility to allow the use of some same-sex and some co-educational groupings for curriculum delivery where appropriate or where needed. *(Addressed at more length on pg 54)*

Pg 20
“The examples and prompts do not set out requirements for student learning; they are optional, not mandatory.” *(This is key as much of the objectionable content is in the examples.)*

Pg. 36
“Some topics within the Healthy Living strand need to be approached with additional sensitivity, care, and awareness because of their personal nature and their connection to family values, religious beliefs, or other social or cultural norms.”

Pg 51 “are students’ diverse backgrounds taken into account when health topics are introduced, to ensure that discussions have personal relevance and that topics are addressed with sensitivity?”

*Grade 1*
Pg. 93 - Proper names for body parts, including genitalia; “all parts of my body are part of me. If I’m hurt or need help, and I know the right words, other people will know what I’m talking about.” *(This really just introduces anti-abuse training.)*

*Grade 7*
Pg. 195 - discussing sexting - “if someone does send you a photo, you should not send it to anyone else or share it online, ”

“explain the importance of ... delaying sexual activity until they are older; ... the reasons for not engaging in sexual activity”

Pg. 196 “If you do not have sex, you don’t need to worry about getting an STI’s”
**Grade 8**
218 - “... I need to have the confidence to tell the other person to stop immediately. And if someone tells me – verbally or non-verbally – to stop, I need to stop immediately.”

219 - “they [students] need to understand that the only 100 per cent sure way of not becoming pregnant or getting an STI, including HIV, is not having sexual contact.”

**2. Cautions:**

**Introductory Material**
Pg 15
“teachers should reflect on their own attitudes, biases, and values with respect to the topics they are teaching and seek out current resources, mentors, and professional development and training opportunities as necessary.”

*This could be used to threaten teachers with biblical moral values, but it also could be used to help teachers respect students with biblical moral values.*

**Grade 4**
Page 136
Grade 4 - First Nations dances are suggested as an activity. *(Possible spiritual overtones?)*

Page 140 - introduced to the concept that someone might ask for “sexual pictures” online *(this is considered negative, which is good)*; bullying includes “homophobic comments” *(which we might consider objectionable, but could also label Christians who disagree with homosexual practices.)*

**Grade 5**
pg. 164 - it is assumed all students will help create a dance sequence together

pg. 167 - references ability to shift weight smoothly during hip hop dancing – are they going to be listening to hip hop during class? *(Hip hop music often has themes of violence and sex – parents should consider asking what music will be used.)*

Pg. 168 “dance activities such as cultural dance, creative movement, and jazz steps...” *(Cultural dance could include spiritual overtones.)*

**Grade 7**
pg. 190 - “demonstrate a dance sequence with a partner” *(same or opposite gender?)*

(Note - in several grades there are references to yoga, yigong, t’ai chi, etc - depending on how these are implemented this may or may not have spiritual connotations)

Pg. 196 “You should be tested by a doctor [for STI’s] if you are sexually active.” *(This follows along the regular line that you can go to a doctor without your parent’s knowledge)*

198 - “using homophobic or racist language is discriminatory.” *(See previous comments)*

201 – “they may feel ‘grown up,’ but still get treated like a kid, and this sometimes leads to
conflicts with parents. They may want more independence.”

Normalizing rebellion? - depends on how presented

Grade 8
217 - “what are some things to be aware of in a relationship to keep yourself and your partner safe?” (This personalizes the curriculum, and could suggest that sexual relationships are the norm)

218 - “demonstrate an understanding of aspects of sexual health and safety, including contraception and condom use for pregnancy and STI prevention, the concept of consent, and matters they need to consider and skills they need to use in order to make safe and healthy decisions about sexual activity (e.g. abstinence ... safer sex and pleasure...)
While we affirm the teaching on abstinence, we aren’t sure that a discussion of the pleasures of a sexual relationship should figure in the grade 8 curriculum.

219 - C3.2 “analyse the impact of violent behaviours, including aggression, anger, swarming, dating violence, and gender-based or racially based violence...”
“gender-based violence includes any form of behaviour... that is based on an individual’s gender and is intended to control, humiliate, or harm the individual. When we say ‘gender-based violence’, we are often referring to violence against women and girls. Can you give examples?

Student: ...physical assault... sexual assault, or rape. [goes on to discuss more minor examples]
While it is true gender-based violence is often against females, this could be construed as “rape culture” teachings (the idea that our culture helps create situations where rape is seen as acceptable). Do we want teachers discussing rape with 13 year olds? The reality is some 13 year olds are raped, so it’s not necessarily totally out of place, but parents should consider consulting teachers on how the issue will be dealt with.

Glossary
232 - homophobia “a disparaging or hostile attitude or a negative bias, which may be overt or unspoken and which may exist at an individual and/or a systematic level, towards people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT). If ‘negative bias’ includes disagreeing that LGBT are healthy lifestyles, then Christian students may be accused of homophobia.

3. Objectionable:
Introductory Material
Pg. 20 “They [specific ways expectations are implemented] must, wherever possible, be inclusive and reflect the diversity of the student population and the population of the province.”
This means that regardless of whether there is diversity in the classroom, every type of diversity found in the province ‘should’ be included in teaching.

Pg 52 - “planning of the health education component of the curriculum requires careful consideration of when material should be taught explicitly and when topics and concepts can be integrated with learning in physical education and linked to learning in other subjects. ... Thirty per cent of instructional time should be allocated to health education.” (Addressed at more length on page 57)
This means children may be exposed to these concepts in any subject at any time, likely without
notice to the parents (however this is likely the norm due to Ontario’s “Accepting Schools” anti-discrimination law).

pg. 66 recommends gay-straight alliances - (which are definitely out of place in an elementary environment)

**Grade 3**
Page. 124 C3.3.
they start talking about gender identity (ie. Anatomical males who self-identify as females) sexual orientation (that some people are attracted to those of the same gender); and non-standard family composition - 2 fathers or 2 mothers. *It would be one thing if the talk was simply that such things exist, but the point of the teaching is really that these are normal.*

**Grade 4**
Page 141 - introduced to the concept that as you get into puberty boys and girls may start to want to be more than just friends. *Do parents really want teachers introducing their children to the idea of dating at age 9? Yes, kids are aware of it, but adult teaching may make it seem more normal than it is.*

**Grade 5**
pg. 157 Explain what you would do if you were being harassed because of your “…gender identity, … sexual orientation, gender expression…”

Pg 158 - first nations “medicine wheel” discussed (mental, physical, spiritual, emotional health) - *it seems First Nations beliefs are the only ones high-lighted in this curriculum.*

Discuss “conflicts between personal desires and cultural teachings and practices” (*this may encourage them to disagree with their upbringing*)

pg 159 student speaking: “things I cannot control include… personal characteristics such as… my gender identity, sexual orientation. … All of these things are a part of who I am. I cannot control these things, but I can control what I do and how I act.” (*While we would affirm the statements that indicate control over actions, gender identity and sexual orientation arguably are not inborn personal characteristics but can be modified.*)

“If you feel like you ‘like someone in a special way,’ what are some appropriate ways of sharing that information…” (Goes on to point out that touching without permission or sharing sexual photos or comments is inappropriate) - *is grade 5 (age 10) when you want teachers to begin teaching your children how to demonstrate they like someone in a special way?*

pg. 160 “homophobic remarks” are inappropriate (*depends on how homophobia is defined, will a student be punished for stating they believe homosexuality is wrong?*)

Pg. 172 - mentions gender identity as something that affects self-concept.

pg. 175 - Teacher prompt: “Things like wet dreams or vaginal lubrication are normal and happen as a result of physical changes with puberty. Exploring one’s body by touching or masturbating is something that many people do and find pleasurable. It is common and is not harmful and is one
way of learning about your body.” (While in the past masturbation has perhaps been demonized, this suggests that it is beneficial and pleasurable without discussing the harm of sexual addiction, lustful thoughts, and possible premature ejaculation in the future).

Discusses consent in the context of relationships – it is hard to say from what is there whether it is sexual consent or all consent that is in view.

Pg. 177 - “assess the effects of stereotypes, including homophobia and assumptions regarding gender roles and expectations, sexual orientation, gender expression...”

Students: “We can get rid of a lot of stereotypes just by finding out more about people who seem to be different. ... We can understand people’s sexual orientations better, for example, by reading books that describe various types of families and relationships. Not everyone has a mother and a father – some might have two mothers or two fathers...” “We need to make sure that we don’t assume that all couples are of the opposite sex, and show this by the words we use. For example, we could use a word like ‘partner’ instead of ‘husband’ or ‘wife.’ We need to be inclusive and welcoming.”

This suggests a move to remove husband and wife from the English vocabulary, also one wonders what books are going to be suggested.

Grade 7

pg. 195 - discussing sexting - “if someone does send you a photo, you should not send it to anyone else or share it online, because respecting privacy and treating others with respect are just as important with online technology as with face-to-face interactions.” Concern: if sending a photo of yourself is actually child pornography, should a student not report it to an authority figure? (This might possibly be addressed under reporting bullying and harassment on page 198)

“explain the importance of having a shared understanding with a partner about the following: delaying sexual activity until they are older (e.g., choosing to abstain from any genital contact; choosing to abstain from having vaginal or anal intercourse; choosing to abstain from having oral-genital contact); the reasons for not engaging in sexual activity; the concept of consent and how consent is communicated; and, in general, the need to communicate clearly with each other when making decisions about sexual activity in the relationship.”

Where is the discussion that the legal age of consent is higher than their age (12 vs.16)? Why are there no warnings about the dangers of anal and/or oral intercourse? Planned Parenthood is a resource many educators use, which publishes posters like this (warning highly objectionable material: http://www.campaignlifecoalition.com/shared/media/editor/file/Anal-Play-101_PlannedParenthoodToronto.pdf)

Pg. 196 “the term abstinence can mean different things to different people. ... Be clear in your own mind about what you are comfortable or uncomfortable with. Being able to talk about this with a partner is an important part of sexual health. Having sex can be an enjoyable experience and can be an important part of a close relationship when you are older.”

The prompt here in no way communicates that sex is more than an enjoyable experience.

199 - c2.4 - “demonstrate an understanding of ... factors that need to be considered when making decisions related to sexual health (e.g. STIs, possible contraceptive side effects, pregnancy, protective value of vaccinations [HPV?] Social labelling, gender identity, sexual orientation, ...”
Grade 8

215 - “identify and explain factors that can affect an individual’s decisions about sexual activity (e.g. ... awareness and acceptance of gender identity and sexual orientation... legal concerns)” “legal concerns” mean they are going to emphasize that they are below the age of consent? (I.e. Age 16 since 2008)

216 - “demonstrate an understanding of gender identity (e.g. male, female, two-spirited, transgender, transsexual, intersex), gender expression, and sexual orientation (e.g. heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual), and identify factors that can help individuals of all identities and orientations develop a positive self-concept.” 
(We would argue that healing and forgiveness is more important than a positive self-concept).

Teacher prompt: “Gender identity refers to a person’s internal sense or feeling of being male or female, which may not be the same as the person’s biological sex. It is different from and does not determine a person’s sexual orientation. Sexual orientation refers to a person’s sense of affection and sexual attraction for people of the same sex, the opposite sex, or both sexes. Gender expression refers to how you demonstrate your gender (based on traditional gender roles) through the ways you act, dress, and behave. Gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation are connected to the way you see yourself and to your interactions with others. Understanding and accepting your gender identity and your sexual orientation can have a strong impact on the development of your self-concept.” (The curriculum goes on to say that it’s important for family and community to accept and support this. Keep in mind that gender identity theory is theory, not fact)

Student: What kind of support do people need? “... having all gender identities and sexual orientations portrayed positively in the media, in literature, and in materials we use at school. Family, school, and community support are crucial. Additional help can come from ... gay-straight alliances.” We could argue that these are over-represented in the media, and that rather than support, acceptance and love that cares enough to help bring healing are what is needed.

218 “Some cultures have special ways of relieving stress. Some First Nation people, for example, use smudging to relieve stress. This is a practice in which people fan smoke from herbs like sage or sweetgrass over their bodies to cleanse them of bad feelings and get rid of negative thoughts and energy. Afterwards, they feel renewed, physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.” Why are they raising First Nations religious teachings?

Glossary

231 - definition of gender “a term that refers to those characteristics of women and men that are socially constructed.” Most people would define gender as something you are born with, but this definition agrees with gender identity theory.

Gender identity “a person’s sense of self, with respect to being male or female. Gender identity is different from sexual orientation, and may be different from birth-assigned sex.” (This theory is not fact-based).

236 - sacred medicines, seven grandfather teachings, seven stages of life; 237 smudging – why is a health class being used to talk about First Nations religion?