

It's All One Curriculum: Guidelines and Activities for a Unified Approach to Sexuality, Gender, HIV, and Human Rights

It's All One Curriculum is exactly what its subtitle claims: a resource kit for developing a rights-based, gender-sensitive, and participatory unified curriculum to instruct adolescents ages 15 and older on the topics of sexuality, gender, HIV and human rights. The program was developed by an international working group comprised of representatives from a number of organizations including International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and Population Council. It has been reviewed by "experts" and field tested by eight organizations. "Financial and collegial support" was provided by organizations that include the Ford Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the IPPF/Western Hemisphere Region, and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). It claims, among other things, to 1) be based on "global research about risks to sexual health"; 2) respond to international policy mandates including the Millennium Development Goals; and 3) focus on the "real world in which young people live their lives."

The seven key features of the curriculum are based on "strategies and priorities established by a number of global health and education agencies, including the United Nations General Assembly, UNAIDS, the World Health Organization, UNESCO, and the World Association for Sexual Health." The first key feature of the curriculum is that it is "evidenced-based, that is, it builds on curricular standards articulated by global researchers." However, this definition of "evidence-based" varies significantly from the generally accepted definition.¹ The "ultimate goal" of the curriculum is "to enable young people to enjoy — and advocate for their rights to — dignity, equality, and healthy, responsible, and satisfying sexual lives."

The biggest problem with It's All One Curriculum is that it is good—very, VERY, disturbingly good. The authors have thought of almost everything. Besides the claim that it is "evidence-based," the guidelines also claim to be "comprehensive," "based on core values and human rights," "gender sensitive," and "culturally appropriate." In addition, the claim is made that when administered as directed, the curriculum will develop students' verbal and listening skills, refine their thinking skills, expand their ideas and knowledge, even "foster democratic values and culture." Students can hone their skills in "expository writing, narrative writing, problem-solving and analysis, planning and implementing a simple research project, or public speaking." The curriculum "promotes academic growth and critical thinking,

¹ In general, evidence-based programs: 1) are based on a clearly articulated and empirically-supported theory; 2) have a detailed description of the intervention and measurement design--what outcomes were produced in what populations with what intervention; 3) have measurable outcomes that have been assessed with psychometrically strong measures, including long-term follow-ups, where indicated; and 4) Have been tested in a scientifically-sound way with comparison conditions, optimally through randomized controlled studies. See Spoth, R. (2004). Pioneering partnerships for tested, health-promoting programs: Toward enhanced core funding and accountability (Submitted to *Journal of Extension*.)

fostering habits of mind necessary for understanding relationships between self, others, and society... Thus, it provides a basis for extending sexuality and HIV education into civics, social studies, and language-arts classrooms.” It also “helps build advocacy skills that are crucial to creating a more just and compassionate society,” and the curriculum will “support higher-order thinking skills (such as research, reflection, and analysis).” and foster students’ connectedness to school.” In this way, the curriculum can be considered to “strengthen education overall, rather than to compete with other valuable academic goals.” Unbelievably, the guidelines even ask instructors to “reflect on your own personal or religious values to be sure you are comfortable with honoring the values of the curriculum as they apply to gender and sexuality.” There is a brief mention of the possibility of encountering “resistance” to the topics, counseling teachers to know who key allies are and to “be aware of those who may oppose your efforts.” Uncharacteristically, parents are mentioned in a positive light— including asking what resources are available “to enable parents to communicate effectively with their children about sexual health issues,” and counsel is given to “Be sure to involve key community members — including parents — in a meaningful way before you begin the work.” Homework for one activity requires that students “ Interview an adult man that you know. Ask him to talk about what he considers to be good qualities in a father.”

Of course, in addition to several positive learning experiences, there are also assignments and activities that many parents may consider inappropriate. These include:

- Preparing a short skit involving an intimate relationship — married, male–female unmarried, or same-sex couple.
- A worksheet on Sexual Desire that includes questions on erections, vaginal lubrication, sexual fantasies
- Discussion on how sexual minorities are treated in society and how their rights are violated
- Real case studies and discussion on homosexuality with the objective of “empathiz[ing] with them”
- Discussion on whether attitudes and ideas about sexual diversity in society are changing
- A true/false test on sexual behavior that includes questions and answers on masturbation², orgasm³, ejaculation, oral sex, sexually pleasing a partner⁴, penis size⁵,

² “There is no problem with masturbating frequently. the only time masturbation can be considered a problem is if it gets in the way of other things the person should be doing or if the person is disturbing other people or otherwise causing harm to themselves.” And “Masturbation is one of the best ways to learn about and understand how one’s body responds to sexual stimulation. it can help women and girls learn how to reach orgasm.”

³ “Vaginal intercourse does not lead to orgasm for many women, regardless of how long the man continues; moreoften, women reach orgasm as the result of direct stimulation to the clitoris.”

⁴ “To minimize discomfort or pain, partners should take time to explore each other’s bodies and become fully aroused before penetration, so that the woman’s vagina is well lubricated.”

- A case study on informed consent gives this example: “Isaac has had several partners but lets Ivan, his new boyfriend, believe that he is still a virgin, as Ivan is. When they have sex, Ivan agrees not to use a condom, thinking there is no risk of infection. Can Ivan give free and informed consent?”
- An activity on making difficult decisions requires students to create a comic strip based on ideas from a list of suggested difficult decisions including: “You have decided to tell your partner that you are not experiencing pleasure (or orgasm) during sex.”

⁵ a large penis does not give a woman more pleasure during intercourse. although women differ, most women say that it is what the man does, not his size, that matters. in fact, a very large penis may be uncomfortable or even painful for a woman.