MTAR-14

Teachers’, Students’, and Parents’ Perspectives on Sex Education Integrated Curriculum for Sixth Grade Students

Chanonya Chaiwongroj1*, Khajornsak Buaraphan2 and Prit Supasetsiri3.

1,2,3 Institute for Innovative Learning, Mahidol University

Abstract

Sex problems are rapidly increasing worldwide including in Thailand. The rate of Thai unplanned teenage pregnancies has been ranked in the first in Asia. Moreover, sex problems now are expanding to primary students. Sex education is expected to help prevent sex problems that should be conducted early in the primary level. This study aims to investigate the stakeholders’ perspectives on sex education integrated curriculum for 6th grade students. Teachers, students and parents are regarded as important stakeholders for sex education. This study was a qualitative research. The participants were nine in-service physical education teachers (seven males, two females), 10 of 6th grade students (one male, nine females), and nine parents (two males, seven females) from Samutsakhon province, Thailand. They were asked to participate in focus group discussions. The qualitative data were analyzed by using a constant comparative method. The results revealed that all groups of participant regarded sex education as being very important for 6th grade students. The participating teachers and parents stated that sex problems tended to expand to primary students because of the easy access to internet media (e.g. YouTube) and sexual stuffs (e.g. sex movies). Teachers and parents need to communicate each other more frequently for updating about students’ sexual related information and problems. All participating groups were interested in sex education integrated curriculum. The parents and students suggested integrating sex education into all subjects in schools. The students preferred to learn sex education through short movies, drama, and role play; while the parents preferred teachers to use sexual related stories and news, models, and Dhamma. The students reflected that their teachers normally taught sex education by textbook-based learning; while the teachers indicated that they normally taught sex education by using a variety of teaching methods and media as short movies, animation, video, and role play. The teachers also reflected that sex education was far from student’s understanding. Finally, the main findings emerged from this study were discussed and utilized for the development of sex education integrated curriculum for sixth grade students in the next phase of the study.

© 2014 The Authors. Published by Global Illuminators. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)
Peer-review under responsibility of the Scientific & Review committee of MTAR-2014.

Keywords— Sex education, integrated curriculum, perspective, sixth grade student, Thailand

Introduction

Sexual problems in teenagers e.g. AIDS, sexual transmitted infections (STIs), illegal abortion and teenage pregnancy, are widely spread and highly concerned by all stakeholders. The rates of STIs, unplanned teenage pregnancies and abortion have been rising

*All correspondence related to this article should be directed Chanonya Chaiwongroj, Institute for Innovative Learning, Mahidol University
Email: chaiwong_non@hotmail.com

© 2015 The Authors. Published by Global Illuminators. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)
Peer-review under responsibility of the Scientific & Review committee of MTAR-2015.
across the world (Kirby, et al., 2007). Particularly in U.S., the rate of teen pregnancy was the highest among Western developed nations (National Campaign, 2003).

The situation of sex problems in Thailand is in crisis and potentially increasing as seen from hot news as “Found more than 2,000 corpses of infants in Wat Prayakai morgue”. In addition, the rate of Thai teen mom was up to 70/1,000 people whereas Japan, Korea and China teen mom were only 4-5/1,000 people. One of solutions for coping with this problem is promoting sex education in the country.

“Sex education” can be defined in many aspects. Kearney (2008) defined “sex education” as a comprehensive course of action from school, socially attitudes, practices and personal conduct of children and adults. In sum, sex education is education about all prospective of sexuality, including information about reproduction (fertilization till childbirth), body image, sexual orientation, sexual values, pleasure, decision making, communication, dating, relationships, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and birth control methods.

Sex education has been developed in many countries in many aspects such as contents and topics, teacher qualification and timing of first sex education instruction (Eisenberg et al., 1997). However, heavy work load and external evaluation are two difficulties teachers face in launching sex education (Kay, et al., 2010). In addition, Lyttleton (1994; 1996) stated that a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective for sex education. Kay et al. (2010) suggest that focusing more on a curriculum serving students’ needs and on age-appropriate information may serve to be more effective in long run. In addition, Kirby et al. (1997) stated that sex education programs should start at an early age.

In Thailand, sex education is mandatory and explicitly mentioned in the 2001 Thai Basic Education Curriculum (B.E. 2544) particularly in the 2nd Learning Strand, namely, “Life and Family” (Thailand’s Compulsory Education Curriculum, 2001). Thai students have to learn sex education from grades 1 to 12. There are several topics and learning indicators related to sex education, including nature of human growth and development, problems and effects of sexual intercourse, contraception methods (condom and contraceptive pills), sexual transmitted infections (STIs), AIDS and unintended pregnancy, etc.

Even though sex education has been included in Thai basic curriculum, the situation about sexual problems in Thailand is not much improved. Thai teenagers have less skill in sexual-related topics and hold some misinformation and entrenched values (Vuttanont, et al., 2006). Some researchers found that peers were the preferred sourced of sexual information for students rather than their parents or teachers. Tipwareerom et al. (2011) did the research in boys and their parents about STIs knowledge and risky sexual behaviors using the model of risky sexual behavior prevention. They found that the participant” scores of STIs knowledge and decision making skills decreased and the parents did not improve their risky sexual behavior skills.

To build effective sex education curriculum, perspectives from involved stakeholders as teachers, students and parents are very important and should be taken into account. Thus, this study aims to explore teachers’, students’ and parents’ perspectives on current situation about sexual problems and desirable characteristics of sex education curriculum for sixth grade students.

Methods

This study is a focus group study. The focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted with the participants, who volunteered Samutsakhon province, Thailand. There were nine in-service primary teachers (seven males, two females), 10 of 6th grade students (one male, nine
females), and nine parents (two males, seven females). The qualitative data were analyzed by using a constant comparative method. This study was ethically approved by Mahidol University Institutional Review Board (MU-IRB).

Results and discussion

There are three themes found from this study: current situation of sexual problems in Thailand, sex education in primary schools, and desirable characteristics of sex education curriculum.

Current situation of sexual problems in Thailand

Sexual problems in Thailand tended to be occurred with younger students. Previously sexual problems happened with 8th and 9th grade students, but now it happened with primary students. The participating teachers and parents pointed out the advancement of technology as a major source such as internet, smart phone, social network etc. For example, primary students especially 6th grade students themselves could access to sexual stuff via internet (sex webs, Facebook, Youtube, Line)

...because of the movies, smart phone, some 5th or 6th grade students imitated from the movies then wrote sexual words in Line or shot naked pictures in Facebook...(parent 04)...nowadays there are a lot of tempting medias, I was once found a 6th grade girl shot herself naked in her smart phone. Finally I found out that she had first intercourse since grade fifth...(teacher07) Note: Teacher 07 is a code to represent the participating teacher no. 7

Moreover, the relationship in family was one cause of sexual problems. For example, some parents may have no time to talk with their child about sexual issues or thought that sexual topics were not appropriate topic to talk with their child. Therefore children went to talk with their friends or searched from internet without any advices from parents. In focus group, only four out of 10 students said that they regularly talked with their parents in every topic.

...talked to mom in everything, she always gave me good advices to do or not to do... (student09)...told mom about friend’s stories even good or bad, she said I should concentrate about learning. It’s a time for studying (student01)... I had talked sexual stuffs with my parents. (student07)

Sex education in primary schools

The participating students stated that their teachers mostly taught sex education by textbook-based teaching. However, their teachers also employed movies from Youtube, sexual-related news from newspapers, physical models or role play in teaching. The three most favorite teaching methods in sex education for the students were short movies, role play and news from newspapers.

...teacher asked us to follow her from the textbook, I understood at that time but I can’t remember. (student07)...teacher showed us the pictures from the textbook, sometimes I had seen from the projector. (student05)

...teacher had real stories, news that made us know how to protect ourselves... (student04)...sometimes teacher have the models for learning human organs or the slides
from PowerPoint.(student01)...teacher had cartoon or animation from YouTube in sex education class...(student06)

The participating teachers did not mention about textbook-based teaching. They said that they used various teaching methods such as short movies, Youtube, real stories from news or newspapers and role play. Importantly, every teacher realized that sex education is important but they emphasized that time for teaching sex education is very limited.

...teaching about sexual stuffs was only in physical education subject, I think it was not enough to teach our students. I need sex education subject...(teacher02)...the mandatory sex education in class was not enough to solve the sex problems in nowadays, we need to integrated the curriculum...(teacher01)...I liked to apply news or real situations to sex education class then let them discuss about the stories...(teacher06)...I need them to criticize the problems by using role play, I gave each group two weeks to work out together and students love to play...(teacher03)

Desirable characteristics of sex education curriculum

When asking the participants about desirable characteristics of sex education curriculum and their opinions in using in integrated sex education curriculum for 6th grade students, participants agreed to have sex education curriculum in primary schools. Some teachers told that they used to integrate sexual topics when teaching Thai language and Science subjects. Also the parents agreed to integrate sex topics in various subjects because it will help their child remember better than only being taught in physical education subject. They said “the more it taught, the better it was”

...I agreed to integrate with Science, Social and Thai language, we can unite the sexual stories into these subjects. It could subsidize the sex problems in nowadays...(teacher02)...it would be fine because Science has sex organ characteristics lesson, Social Sciences teach about behavior in each social environment, also in Thai language I taught Thai motto about Thai women should have properly manner and behave like women in ancient time ...(teacher03)

...I suggested applying Dhamma with sex education, it might be good to have monk taught Dhamma in school again...(parent06)...I think mixing four subjects together might be fun and interested...(student03)...it should be fine and might be more understand...(student09)

Both participating teachers and parents in this study agreed to start sex education since the primary level as Kirby et al. (1997) suggested that sex education should be started at an early age. In addition, the participating teachers realized the importance of having sex education in the curriculum and stated that the learning hours allocated for sex education was quite limited. This is similar to Kay et al. (2010) who stated that only five to eight hours per one academic year was not enough for teaching sex education. The integration of sex education in other subjects such as science, social studies, and Thai language is needed to help solve the time limitation.

The students showed that they preferred to learn sex education through short movies, role play and news rather than textbooks. Then, the teachers should employ a variety of teaching methods and materials in teaching sex education in order to serve the students’ needs and preferred learning styles. Finally, helping prevent sexual problems, it needs cooperation from all stakeholders; teachers, students and parents. Teachers and parents need
to communicate to each other more frequently for updating the status of students’ sexual
problems. Parents should be open-minded for talking with their child about sexual topics.
Nolin and Peterson (1992) suggested that parents should have open conversation with their
children about sexual stuffs in order to promote positive sexual behaviors and attitudes in
adolescence.

Implications

This study will lead to the construction of learning unit for teaching sex education for
grade 6 students in Thailand. The students’ preferred learning materials and styles are taken
into account in the new learning unit. In addition, sex education will be integrated with other
subjects as Science, Social science and Thai language to become an integrated curriculum for
sex education. The integrated curriculum is expected to cope with time limitation for
teaching sex education and Sexual problems in teenagers e.g. AIDS, sexual transmitted
infections (STIs), illegal abortion and teenage pregnancy, are widely spread and highly
concerned by all stakeholders. The rates of STIs, unplanned teenage pregnancies and
abortion have been rising across the world (Kirby, et al., 2007). Particularly in U.S., the rate
of teen pregnancy was the highest among Western developed nations (National Campaign,
2003).

The situation of sex problems in Thailand is in crisis and potentially increasing as
seen from hot news as “Found more than 2,000 corpses of infants in Wat Prayakai morgue”.
In addition, the rate of Thai teen mom was up to 70/1,000 people whereas Japan, Korea and
China teen mom were only 4-5/1,000 people. One of solutions for coping with this problem
is promoting sex education in the country.

“Sex education” can be defined in many aspects. Kearney (2008) defined “sex
education” as a comprehensive course of action from school, socially attitudes, practices and
personal conduct of children and adults. In sum, sex education is education about all
prospective of sexuality, including information about reproduction (fertilization till
childbirth), body image, sexual orientation, sexual values, pleasure, decision making,
communication, dating, relationships, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and birth control
methods.

Sex education has been developed in many countries in many aspects such as
contents and topics, teacher qualification and timing of first sex education instruction
(Eisenberg et al., 1997). However, heavy work load and external evaluation are two
difficulties teachers face in launching sex education (Kay, et al., 2010). In addition, Lyttleton
(1994; 1996) stated that a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective for sex education. Kay et
al. (2010) suggest that focusing more on a curriculum serving students’ needs and on age-
appropriate information may serve to be more effective in long run. In addition, Kirby et al.
(1997) stated that sex education programs should start at an early age.

In Thailand, sex education is mandatory and explicitly mentioned in the 2001 Thai
Basic Education Curriculum (B.E. 2544) particularly in the 2nd Learning Strand, namely,
“Life and Family” (Thailand’s Compulsory Education Curriculum, 2001). Thai students have
to learn sex education from grades 1 to 12. There are several topics and learning indicators
related to sex education, including nature of human growth and development, problems and
effects of sexual intercourse, contraception methods (condom and contraceptive pills), sexual
transmitted infections (STIs), AIDS and unintended pregnancy, etc.
Even though sex education has been included in Thai basic curriculum, the situation about sexual problems in Thailand is not much improved. Thai teenagers have less skill in sexual-related topics and hold some misinformation and entrenched values (Vuttanont, et al., 2006). Some researchers found that peers were the preferred source of sexual information for students rather than their parents or teachers. Tipwareerom et al. (2011) did the research in boys and their parents about STIs knowledge and risky sexual behaviors using the model of risky sexual behavior prevention. They found that the participant’ scores of STIs knowledge and decision making skills decreased and the parents did not improve their risky sexual behavior skills.

To build effective sex education curriculum, perspectives from involved stakeholders as teachers, students and parents are very important and should be taken into account. Thus, this study aims to explore teachers’, students’ and parents’ perspectives on current situation about sexual problems and desirable characteristics of sex education curriculum for sixth grade students.

Methods

This study is a focus group study. The focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted with the participants, who volunteered Samutsakhon province, Thailand. There were nine in-service primary teachers (seven males, two females), 10 of 6th grade students (one male, nine females), and nine parents (two males, seven females). The qualitative data were analyzed by using a constant comparative method. This study was ethically approved by Mahidol University Institutional Review Board (MU-IRB).

Results and discussion

There are three themes found from this study: current situation of sexual problems in Thailand, sex education in primary schools, and desirable characteristics of sex education curriculum.

Current situation of sexual problems in Thailand

Sexual problems in Thailand tended to be occurred with younger students. Previously sexual problems happened with 8th and 9th grade students, but now it happened with primary students. The participating teachers and parents pointed out the advancement of technology as a major source such as internet, smart phone, social network etc. For example, primary students especially 6th grade students themselves could access to sexual stuff via internet (sex webs, Facebook, Youtube, Line)

…because of the movies, smart phone, some 5th or 6th grade students imitated from the movies then wrote sexual words in Line or shot naked pictures in Facebook…(parent 04)…nowadays there are a lot of tempting medias, I was once found a 6th grade girl shot herself naked in her smart phone. Finally I found out that she had first intercourse since grade fifth…(teacher07) Note: Teacher 07 is a code to represent the participating teacher no. 7

Moreover, the relationship in family was one cause of sexual problems. For example, some parents may have no time to talk with their child about sexual issues or thought that sexual topics were not appropriate topic to talk with their child. Therefore children went to talk with their friends or searched from internet without any advices from parents. In focus group, only four out of 10 students said that they regularly talked with their parents in every topic.
talked to mom in everything, she always gave me good advices to do or not to do… (student09)…told mom about friend’s stories even good or bad, she said I should concentrate about learning. It’s a time for studying (student01)... I had talked sexual stuffs with my parents. (student07)

**Sex education in primary schools**

The participating students stated that their teachers mostly taught sex education by textbook-based teaching. However, their teachers also employed movies from Youtube, sexual-related news from newspapers, physical models or role play in teaching. The three most favorite teaching methods in sex education for the students were short movies, role play and news from newspapers.

…teacher asked us to follow her from the textbook, I understood at that time but I can’t remember. (student07)...teacher showed us the pictures from the textbook, sometimes I had seen from the projector. (student05)

…teacher had real stories, news that made us know how to protect ourselves… (student04)...sometimes teacher have the models for learning human organs or the slides from PowerPoint.(student01)...teacher had cartoon or animation from YouTube in sex education class…(student06)

The participating teachers did not mention about textbook-based teaching. They said that they used various teaching methods such as short movies, Youtube, real stories from news or newspapers and role play. Importantly, every teacher realized that sex education is important but they emphasized that time for teaching sex education is very limit.

…teaching about sexual stuffs was only in physical education subject, I think it was not enough to teach our students. I need sex education subject...(teacher02)...the mandatory sex education in class was not enough to solve the sex problems in nowadays , we need to integrated the curriculum...(teacher01)...I liked to apply news or real situations to sex education class then let them discuss about the stories...(teacher06)...I need them to criticize the problems by using role play, I gave each group two weeks to work out together and students love to play...(teacher03)

**Desirable characteristics of sex education curriculum**

When asking the participants about desirable characteristics of sex education curriculum and their opinions in using in integrated sex education curriculum for 6th grade students, participants agreed to have sex education curriculum in primary schools. Some teachers told that they used to integrate sexual topics when teaching Thai language and Science subjects. Also the parents agreed to integrate sex topics in various subjects because it will help their child remember better than only being taught in physical education subject. They said “the more it taught, the better it was”

…I agreed to integrate with Science, Social and Thai language, we can unite the sexual stories into these subjects. It could subsidize the sex problems in nowadays...(teacher02)...it would be fine because Science has sex organ characteristics lesson, Social Sciences teach about behavior in each social environment, also in Thai language I taught Thai motto about Thai women should have properly manner and behave like women in ancient time ...(teacher03)
...I suggested applying Dhamma with sex education, it might be good to have monk taught Dhamma in school again...(parent06)...I think mixing four subjects together might be fun and interested...(student03)...it should be fine and might be more understand...(student09)

Both participating teachers and parents in this study agreed to start sex education since the primary level as Kirby et al. (1997) suggested that sex education should be started at an early age. In addition, the participating teachers realized the importance of having sex education in the curriculum and stated that the learning hours allocated for sex education was quite limited. This is similar to Kay et al. (2010) who stated that only five to eight hours per one academic year was not enough for teaching sex education. The integration of sex education in other subjects such as science, social studies, and Thai language is needed to help solve the time limitation.

The students showed that they preferred to learn sex education through short movies, role play and news rather than textbooks. Then, the teachers should employ a variety of teaching methods and materials in teaching sex education in order to serve the students’ needs and preferred learning styles. Finally, helping prevent sexual problems, it needs cooperation from all stakeholders; teachers, students and parents. Teachers and parents need to communicate to each other more frequently for updating the status of students’ sexual problems. Parents should be open-minded for talking with their child about sexual topics. Nolin and Peterson (1992) suggested that parents should have open conversation with their children about sexual stuffs in order to promote positive sexual behaviors and attitudes in adolescence.

Implications

This study will lead to the construction of learning unit for teaching sex education for grade 6 students in Thailand. The students’ preferred learning materials and styles are taken into account in the new learning unit. In addition, sex education will be integrated with other subjects as Science, Social science and Thai language to become an integrated curriculum for sex education. The integrated curriculum is expected to cope with time limitation for teaching sex education and promote holistic learning in students. One of key factors is parents, so parents should cooperate and communicate with schools more frequently for updating their students’ behaviors and problems.

References


