

Barbara Kay: Suggestions for the new Ontario sex-ed curriculum

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Doug Ford's victory was in some measure due to his promise — I believe a heartfelt one — to repeal the sex ed curriculum in Ontario schools. I assume there's a replacement program in the works. A sex-ed vacuum is not politically tenable, or even what most conservative parents want.

What principles will undergird a Doug Ford inspired curriculum? I'd suggest four guidelines for his consideration. First, take sex ed out of the hands of ideologues and activists. Constitute a task force made up of a variety of stakeholders, involving both liberal and conservative parents (including parents of LGBT students), disinterested scientific authorities and, yes, religious representatives, to hammer out recommendations for a sex ed paradigm, in which science is separated from theory, and in which proponents of morality and modesty-based sex ed have a voice and a vote.

Second, revisit the underlying premise in sex ed today that all children must learn everything under the sun that touches on sexuality from the state.

In 2012 "Sex: a Tell-All Exhibition," produced by the publicly supported Montreal Science Centre, opened at the Ottawa Museum of Science and technology after touring Montreal and Regina. Schoolchildren aged 12 and over were scheduled to see it. One feature of the exhibit was a video animation of a male and female masturbating. This isn't something adolescents need graphic (or any) instruction in. More disconcerting, youngsters were watching this in the presence of strangers watching them. Forcing sexual imagery on children in the company of unknown adults is unethical; there is a whiff of voyeurism behind that video's conception. (Protest led to a minimum entry age of 16 being established before the event opened.)

Of course this exhibit was not part of the Ontario sex ed curriculum. But it speaks to an assumption amongst some of our cultural elites that the more one knows about sex, and the more openly it is handled, the better and healthier it is. I'm neither religious nor prudish, but I vigorously reject that assumption, and so do many other conservatives.

Nothing would be lost, for example, if sex ed in early grades was taught in sex-specific groups. I believe modesty is a natural trait in children and that single-sex forums provide a more appropriate environment for discussion of intensely private issues, like masturbation, menstruation and wet dreams.

Third, there is the question of readiness. Children can be taught the facts of biology quite early, but there is no need to engage young children in detailed discussion of sexual preferences before they fully understand the nature of sexual desire. It is obviously appropriate to warn against internet porn and social media perils at a fairly early age, and the reality of same-sex couples (including parents of students) openly acknowledged, but full engagement in the nature of sexual desire in all its diversity and detail is best left for adolescence.

Finally, nowhere is the need for distinction between science and theory more urgently required than in the area of transgenderism.

Much of what children are learning about transgenderism today, at a very tender age, is not science-based, but activist-dictated theory that can result in psychological harm.

In California last year, at an upscale school, a Sacramento schoolteacher sent a gender-dysphoric boy into the washroom, where he changed into girl's clothing and re-emerged as a "girl." The teacher told her kindergarten students to use the child's new girl name. Parents were outraged when their children came home distressed, with some children reportedly "crying, afraid they were turning into the opposite sex."

This is abuse of professional authority, a dreadful manipulation of children's self-confidence and sense of objective reality. Indeed, "gaslighting" is not too strong a word for that teacher's gender-bender theatrics.

Any classroom discussion of transgenderism must be handled with extreme sensitivity and restraint. The theory of gender fluidity should not be introduced at all until students have the critical thinking skills to distinguish between theory and scholarship. The doubt-encouraging "Genderbread" charts, which attempt to explain differences between gender identity, sexual preference and biological sex and have been brought into Ontario classrooms by some teachers, should disappear altogether.

Individual cases of dysphoria in young children should be a matter between parents and their chosen therapist. "Watch and wait" should be the default approach in schools. Children are capable of accommodating the kind of difference they

may encounter in genuinely dysphoric classmates without an entire program spent on what is in fact extremely rare. State-sponsored sex ed is only one component of a child's education. If they believe in social-engineering theories, let progressive parents teach their kids "social construction" and "gender fluidity" at home. But responsible sex ed has, as its first obligation, to respect parents as the first line of protection from experimentation with their children's minds, and to Do No Harm. I hope that credo will be the sex-education watchword in Ontario on Doug Ford's political watch.

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