



**SEXUAL HEALTH AND RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION PROGRAM
4 December 2003**

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): The duplicity of the Minister for Education and Children's Services is demonstrated clearly in the delaying tactics that she and the government have used to prevent this debate being held.

The Hon. P.L. WHITE: I rise on a point of order, Mr Speaker. The honourable member has just accused me of duplicity when it was the member for Bragg who deferred this motion, not I. I request that she apologise for that incorrect assertion.

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister makes an interesting debating point. Regrettably, under standing orders it is not appropriate to debate the subject matter to which the honourable member refers. The word 'duplicity' is not a unparliamentary, but it is fairly strong language. I ask all members to bear that in mind whenever they use such terminology.

Mrs PENFOLD: Her actions caused the shadow minister to delay this second motion until today to ensure that it was first on the list and could not be further delayed by the Labor government's filibustering. Similarly, parental and public concern about parts of the sex education course have been brutally disregarded for months. I outlined the details of these problems in my original speech which I was prevented from giving in the last session but which can be found on my web site. The minister has ignored petitions containing thousands of signatures presented to this house. Concerned parents and members of the public have written to her and/or other members of the Labor cabinet (including the Premier). Three parents from Port Lincoln (one of whom has a child currently undertaking the course) representing about 40 parents of schoolchildren arranged a meeting in Adelaide on 29 September 2003. The minister was apparently unable to meet with the delegation herself despite the distance they had travelled and the time and cost involved, but said that the delegation could meet with some of her staff and SHine representatives and that all the information from the meeting would then be passed on to her. However, on the ABC's *Stateline* program on 24 October 2003 the minister stated: *"To date, I haven't had one parent of a child actually doing the course complain to my office."*

Either the minister has a very poor memory or she did not get her staff to brief her about the meetings and did not read the letters or her responses to the parents, or she is deliberately trying to change the facts. Whichever is the case, she is unfit for the position of Minister for Education and Children's Services, a position she holds in trust for all South Australians, particularly our children. I repeat what the minister said on *Stateline*: *"To date, I haven't had one parent of a child actually doing the course complain to my office."*

I am also personally aware that at least three letters dated 26 June, 9 July and 14 August 2003 were sent by one concerned parent with a child in the course to the minister. My constituents were singularly unimpressed by the minister's comment. I suggest that the minister re-read her correspondence, get a briefing from staff about the meeting on 29 September, and apologise to the parents, *Stateline* and the public of South Australia for misleading them.

Sex education has been in our schools for decades, and it is supported by parents. Like all teaching, periodic upgrades are necessary. When in office, the former Liberal government contacted SHine to write a sex education course relevant to today's society. However, by the time that was completed, Labor was in office. What SHine developed was accepted without its being critiqued prior to its being implemented. Surely, in presenting a new curriculum in an area as sensitive as sex education, the advice of professionals would be sought and heeded. Professional people in various fields associated with children are now expressing their concern about aspects of the course. The fact that it is still inadequate is a reflection of the minister's inadequacies, as adjustments could easily have been made earlier to about the 10 per cent I estimate is

considered offensive to those few people who are aware of it.

The minister also stated the following on *Stateline*: “*This program is a trial. . . it involved the highest level of parental consent. . . what we ask parents to do is to attend an information session where they're shown what their children will be taught, they can ask questions and sign a consent form.*”

Yet this course was already being taught in at least one trial school prior to these information meetings being held. Consent forms were distributed and asked to be returned to the school prior to the information night at the school. Hence, the minister's statement that parents would be asked to sign a consent form following the information session is another incorrect statement and another ministerial blunder. Parents advise that, when they were finally given a briefing after the start of the course, the material on show at the sessions was limited and that they only had a short time (about 10 minutes) to look through what was there. It certainly was not enough time to read much of it, and questions were sidestepped. It seems the minister is badly out of touch with her department. The opt-in or opt-out scenario promotes abuse of students. There is no other alternative offered to students or to parents who choose to withdraw from the course.

I have been told that the SHARE component is often taught as the first part of a double health and physical education lesson. Students who withdraw from the SHARE segment sit in the library. On occasions, some withdrawn students who failed to go back into class, either due to embarrassment or simply not knowing that it was time to do so, were disciplined. Therefore, how fair or effective is it for students to opt out of the course? At least one student, due to embarrassment, has refused to go back to school on a day when a SHARE lesson is likely to be taught. Concerned parents have discussed the course with local schools, with people from the Department of Education and Children's Services, and with representatives of SHine.

In the *Stateline* program referred to above, the minister was specifically asked by the interviewer, Ian Henschke, ‘Will you change the teachers' handbook?’ Again, the minister sidestepped the question, perhaps because she was unaware that the teachers' handbook had already been changed in some particulars that were questioned as either inaccurate or unnecessary for the course.

A delegation that met with SHine and DECS in Adelaide on 23 October was advised that certain areas of the course that had been causing some dismay and unhappiness in communities were being tidied up. This admission confirmed that there are problem areas, not just problem parents and troublemakers, as claimed by the minister. The delegates further stated: Again we expressed our support for sex and relationship education and we have a desire to work with DECS on a course that seeks to instill in our children a greater sense of responsibility in the area of sex and relationships.

At this same meeting, a participating parent was told that students are given take-home material after every lesson. Since neither he nor his children had sighted any such material, he contacted the school, only to be told by the teacher that she had no idea what the parent was talking about. Surely, this is a major signal that either a lie has been told by SHine and DECS or that the 15 hours of teacher training was inadequate. If this is happening in the trial stage, one wonders what will happen when the course has been there a while and relief teachers or new teachers take over.

If the minister was unaware of this lapse in protocol—and her knowledge and interest in the issue is open to question—I ask her to investigate this matter to ensure that, in future, teachers are well trained and informed about departmental guidelines regarding take-home material to be sent home with each student. Parents would have some idea of what has been discussed in class. They could then continue discussions with their children, using the opportunity to add the values they want to pass on to their children, or just expand on discussions that have been held in the class.

In a letter to me dated 23 October, the minister said that ‘*additionally, consultation will continue throughout the trial and feedback from parents will be part of the evaluation of the program*’. I ask: how are parents supposed to give informed feedback if they do not receive any take-home material? One of these issues is what one parent termed ‘saved sex’, that is, refraining from sexual intercourse until married or in a committed, one-partner, monogamous relationship. The course does not specifically outline the reasons for saved sex, nor the heartbreak that can be caused by premature sex

Time expired

My speech would have continued..

.....that can have life-long effects for individuals particularly those who contract diseases or become pregnant.

Proponents of the course argue that the decision not to be sexually active is put to students however they can't point to where exactly that is part of the course.

The students handbook gives an example of a boy and girl who have had climatic manual sex but not penetrative sex and who are discussing whether or not to go further. That is not saved sex.

Not all teenagers have a boyfriend or a girl friend. There are normal teenagers who fill their time with sport and hobbies and school and friends. There is nothing in this course for kids like this. They are not abnormal but would be made to feel so unless amendments are made to this course's content.

Changes are eventually being made but **more** needs to be done.

One area of very grave concern that is not addressed is the issue of children who have been sexually abused, or who are being sexually abused. In fact, this course gives no support to these kids, and no ideas on how to handle a situation like this, how to get out of it, how to avoid it.

When this matter was queried by parents, they were told that kids could leave the room if they couldn't handle the lesson. That in itself is condoning and strengthening the abuse.

The media almost every day carries a report of another victim of child abuse and bullying. Indeed following the release of the Layton report, the government has allocated additional funds to FAYS to deal with the victims of abuse. Surely these are issues that an effective sex education course should be assisting students with.

Mr Speaker, I deplore the deviousness and untruths which the Minister has resorted to when attempting to defend her lack of action to quickly improve this necessary course and reduce the pressure on the parents and students who have been the unwilling guinea pigs. The parents I have spoken to are happy to have a sex education course and certainly do not want to withdraw their children, causing them the considerable pain of being branded different.

Parliament has this opportunity to do the Minister's work for her – that is, to have this course withdrawn until it is professionally assessed and amended. Then let the trial begin again.

I support the motion.

SEX EDUCATION SPEECH

Prevented from being presented on the 17th July 2003 by the Labor Party, however the motion will be reinstated next session and I will try to give it then.

In support of Vickie Chapman's motion: *"That this house urges the government to immediately withdraw the trial sexual health and relationships education program developed by SHINE, from all 14 participating schools pending professional assessment and endorsement"*.

No Minister. We don't want our eleven to fifteen year old children to get their sex education "down behind the back of the bike sheds

Nor do we want children withdrawn from the sex education course with all the pressure on them and their parents that that would entail. I have even been told of one case where a student was approached by a teacher about his parents stand against parts of the course and told that they were 'over reacting'.

These same parents had raised their concerns at a parents meeting about page 5 of the students booklet *"Tell it like it is"*. This is where one girl asks another, "Has he made you orgasm?" The father was given, as the only response by the Shine representative, that he "could withdraw his child or send him to a Catholic school."

Parents feel that their children may be being used as guinea pigs in a research project and that their concerns are not being listened to.

One reason given to a parent for not changing the course was that, as this is a trial, all the variables had to stay the same. The parent was told, "We want to see if this changes the way children behave after three years."

What if the changes are negative after 3 years. The damage will have been done. And who is going to assess the outcome and decide whether it is positive or negative. Shine representatives, parents or appropriately qualified independent people?

It is this poor communication that has inflamed the situation in Port Lincoln where teachers have allegedly indicated that they have been verbally abused.

We want the course changed now, not in three years, to ensure it is more age appropriate, to take the emphasis off some things and put more strongly on others, and for every student to be able to participate.

This course is in 14 schools ostensibly as a trial before being put into all schools and as such should be open to change. Currently the only barrier between this course being taught well and taught poorly and inappropriately, are good teachers.

Already undertakings designed to ensure that the children and their parents are protected have been violated.

We were told that this trial course in the first instance would be an 'opt in' course but it has become an 'opt out' course.

We were told that parents would be properly informed about the course before they gave their consent. But there was little indication of the content given to parents in the brief consent form.

Even the parents who ticked the box asking for more information were let down when they discovered that their children were undertaking the course before they attended the briefing.

We were told that in Port Lincoln there were only 10 parents, too few to warrant a visit by the trainers and they could wait till next time. I was surprised that there were even 10 given the lack of information given to indicate that this is a trial and contained material that might be controversial.

Even the briefings that have been provided, according to some parents have given little time for feed back or opportunity to scrutinise the source document to be used by the teachers, or to ask questions.

The Advertiser on page 11, July 2, 2003, "Love is in the air as class gets beyond the basics," article is also misleading as the class was of 16 and 17 year olds in year 10 when this course is designed for 11 to 15 year olds as stated on the cover of "Teach it like it is".

I and many others wouldn't have such problems with the course if it were for 16 and 17 year olds. Why- if this is a trial - wouldn't the media be encouraged to be aware of the details of the course and the age group it is targeted to.

If the system is breaking down before the course is even past the trial stage how long before the teachers presenting it don't receive the 15 mandated hours of training that were stipulated.

How long before teachers who, not wanting to take the course or who are not properly trained, are coerced into teaching it or, heaven forbid, ones that have an inclination toward paedophilia get into positions where they can influence young minds.

We have recently heard of the case of the science teacher Colin Fearon who allegedly spent more than 35 years abusing students and still hasn't been brought to justice. So it can happen.

However we do want sex education to be taught but in the context of sex being only part of the whole of our

children's lives, with the understanding that decisions made in any part of life can affect the remainder of life either positively or negatively.

The need for individuals to think before they act and the need to communicate well with those around them, particularly parents, when assessing what decisions are right for them, now and into the future, must be part of the course.

Perhaps the scenario cards need to also ask, "How might this decision affect your future health and relationships with a future partner, family and peers?"

What to include and what to put more emphasis on in my view are:

Respect for themselves, friends and family while warning of the risks of, and what to do about, incest, paedophilia and particularly the potential danger of internet contacts, none of which have I seen mentioned, should be included. We keep saying that the young are our future but I don't think that they feel as if society values them and our suicide rates would indicate this.

It's their body and their life and they have the right and the responsibility to look after it with practical support from us and from one another. That it's OK to say no and in actual fact it is against the law to have sexual intercourse before 17 years of age should be included in the students

"Tell it like it is" booklet, giving those who want to say no and their parents, more support.

They need to understand quite strongly the importance of the decisions that they make now, for the long term benefit of their future and for this reason there should be more information on such things as the long term effects of alcohol, drugs, AIDs and STDs with the possibility of passing a disease on to a future partner or child or making them infertile.

What to remove and what to take the emphasis off in my view include:

The finer points of homosexual, bisexual and heterosexual activities that are spelt out in unnecessary detail – these should be edited out. I quote from the parent's book "*Talk it like it is*" page 7: "Condoms keep both partners safe so it's important when having: oral sex to use a dam to cover the vulva or anus, or a condom to cover the penis."

Apart from the fact that condoms don't necessarily keep both partners safe, none of my staff aged from 21 to 72, had ever heard of a dam. One of my staff made Inquiries at a chemist and none of the staff there had ever heard of it either, so is it necessary for 11 to 15 year olds?

The 4 pages in 'Tell it like it is' of so called historical facts are not helpful or necessary and could undermine parents authority by discrediting their beliefs and should be removed. The reference to castration being preached by Christians, for instance, gives the impression that this was acceptable when, in fact, it was an extreme behaviour of a few and was banned by the church.

The reference to the signs of the zodiac that identify the personality types of the characters, should be removed from the students' "*Tell it like it is*" booklet. Astrology shouldn't be given this credibility.

I have been told of one young man who was going through a difficult time in his marriage. When he was told that he and his wife's signs were incompatible and that they would never get together again, he committed suicide.

5 of the 28 safe practice cards should be removed from the "*Teach it like it is*" "A relationships and sexual health curriculum resource for teachers of middle school students" page 166 and 167, 30 minute lesson for aged 11+ students.

These are and I quote, "Fingering: inserting finger(s) into a partner's vagina. Oral sex: using your tongue to stimulate a partner's genital area. Anal intercourse: inserting your penis into a partner's anus. Masturbation: giving yourself (or partner sexual pleasure by rubbing genitals). Using a sex toy: using a device for sexual

arousal”.

It is interesting to note that the Sexually transmitted infection, (STI) card game covering, herpes, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, chlamydia, gonorrhoea, and syphilis, is programmed for a 45 minute lesson with children in the 13+ aged group.

Presumably between the ages of 11 and 13 the children do not need to know the consequences of sexual activity which I would have expected to have been taught together, whenever they were taught.

Perhaps it would be best to have a few teachers who are well trained travelling from school to school to ensure that a broader course covering communication, sex and relationships is properly, consistently and appropriately taught.

Or perhaps existing qualified school counsellors could become personal whole-of-life trainers, helping young people to set their life goals and teaching sex in the context of life as part of their program.

Bishop John Hepworth stated in a radio interview: “I’ve got over 20 years experience with ethics committees and this (course) would be laughed to scorn in any ethics committee in Australia.”

However this course, despite being a trial using school children has not had any ethics assessment that I am aware of.

To sum up: I have no problems with about 90% of this course. The other 10% I would like to see removed and possibly another 40% added to provide more balance.

I believe that this is an opportunity to look at a better and more balanced course with more security about who teaches it and how it is taught, not in 3 years time but now.

I end with a quote from the parents’ book ‘*Talk it like it is*’, a quote that applies to all of us and to all our children: “Be aware of the education your child is receiving at school so that you can support and discuss this at home.”

I support the motion