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Edited by Rex S. Rogers

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REX S. ROGERS

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To Karina with love

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The right rule is simple: until a child is nearing the age of puberty teach him or her no sexual morality whatever, and carefully avoid instilling the idea that there is anything disgusting in the natural bodily functions. As the time approaches when it becomes necessary to give moral instruction, be sure that it is rational, and that at every point you can give good grounds for what you say.

BERTRAND RUSSELL, *The Conquest of Happiness*

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Preface

Sex education is a growing social and educational phenomenon. Unlike other innovations such as ‘New Mathematics’, however, its introduction into curricula has broader implications – for it reflects and, in turn, influences a change in contemporary values. Such changes are seldom totally comfortable, either for the members of society experiencing them or for those whose lot it is to implement them. Concern about the issues raised by sex education, as much as the growth in the demand for it, seem responsible for the ever-expanding literature on the subject.

In this book of readings, I have tried to avoid the format of a lot of good advice but little hard fact. I have concentrated instead on a more empirical approach, using research findings wherever possible to illustrate the grounds for sex education, its spread in the educational system and the effects it has. In doing this, I hope I have provided a text useful to all those involved in sexual instruction. No apologies, in a field dominated by North American and Scandinavian literature, are made for a certain bias towards the work of British writers.

In a controversial field like sex education, it is perhaps worthwhile pointing out that a book of readings, however much it indicates an editor’s judgement of what is important, cannot take a stand on issues in the same way as would be expected of a single individual’s text. One function of the commentaries in the present book is to provide some perspective and, as such, is obviously open to criticism. One reaction I would like to anticipate relates to my use of the expression ‘sex education’ itself. It is, in my view, little more than an umbrella phrase – useful as a rubric because it guides the reader (more effectively than do the alternatives) as to what range of phenomena are being considered. Synonyms, such as ‘sexual instruction’, have been used where a need existed to lighten the load of textual repetitiveness.

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As always in the production of a book, thanks are due to many hidden hands: Professor Hilde Himmelweit under whose aegis and guidance my own research (p. 251) was conducted; Dorothy Dallas and Alan Harris who gave much constructive criticism on earlier drafts; and, by no means least, to Wendy Davies who spent many long hours trying to turn it into something readable. Errors, biases and omissions are mine alone.

University of Reading

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