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Blueprint National Drug Education Research Programme : an update

The Blueprint Drug Education Research Programme was set up to ensure that future drug education policy was based on tested and tried evidence developed in England.

Blueprint is funded by the Government and is a partnership between the Home Office, the DfES and Department of Health as part of the National Drug Strategy.

The full results are due in 2007, but there are interim findings that will be shared as Blueprint progresses.

Research evidence

Blueprint was developed by gathering evidence about 'what works' from international research from a number of countries. A comprehensive literature review identified a number of common elements on which the programme was built. Research indicated that effective drug education programmes:

1. are research driven
2. are developmentally appropriate
3. have a broad skills base
4. include normative education
5. include social resistance skills
6. use interactive teaching styles
7. include teacher training
8. have adequate lesson coverage
9. are culturally sensitive
10. include added components such as schools, parents and families, community, health policy and media
11. are rigorously evaluated

Five areas of work

Blueprint was designed using the above points as the framework with 5 broad areas of work: Schools, Parents, Media, Community and Health Policy.

Schools Programme

10 x 50 minute lessons are delivered in year 7

- introduction and scene setting
- what we know about drugs and why people use them
- finding out more about drugs
- facts and myths about drugs and drug use
- values and attitudes about drugs
- drugs and advertising

- making decisions about drugs
- resisting pressures
- creating presentations about our learning
- giving presentations

5 x 50 minute lessons are delivered in year 8

- thinking back, looking forward
- facts, risks and effects
- is everyone doing it ?
- alcohol: risks and effects
- reducing the risks, getting help

All the lessons were developed with very clearly identified learning objectives and used active learning principles of 'do, review and reflect.' The 'do' element of the lessons consisted of a range of activities including competitions, board games, card games, role play, prioritising activities and continuum exercises. All lessons were structured to ensure that pupils had the time to review their learning and reflect on what they gained learning was for them.

Materials were all trialled and tested by schools before being used and commissioned work using 'Draw and Write' techniques informed the lesson content.

Teachers all received 6 full days of customised training which was largely interactive and offered chances to experience materials and methods similar to those used in the lessons themselves. Five central themes ran through the training. These were:

1. drug awareness
2. beliefs, values and attitudes
3. skill building
4. review and reflection on learning
5. classroom management

Over 50 classroom materials were all designed to the highest quality. They have been much appreciated by both pupils and teachers and seen as one of the very high points of the whole programme.

School Drugs Advisers were also used to support teachers in the delivery of the programme, proving a great advantage to many of the teachers who valued the benefits of having some team teaching and mentoring opportunities.

Parents and families

Parents and carers were seen as integral to the Blueprint Programme and substantial efforts were made to provide them with information and support and to offer some guidance on ways that they may communicate effectively with their children on many issues, drugs included.

In both years of the programme parents received information booklets on drugs and drug use and interactive parent magazines, designed to help them understand and work along side their children on the topics covered in the lessons.

Drug awareness sessions were run at all Programme schools when those who attended were invited to come along to workshops on building skills talking with their children.

The sessions all offered transport, crèche and play areas, food and free videos and were supported in varying degrees by all the schools.

Media

Blueprint's media component is essential in backing up work with schools, parents and more closely, the community. It establishes cohesion and coherence

of the messages about drugs and drug use. A media company was used to deliver these regional messages and in the two years of the work over 150 positive media pieces were in the press.

Health Policy

This component had two main pieces of work attached to it. All schools have reviewed their drug policy with the involvement of parents and pupils and the tool produced by Blueprint to do this has been published on the website of the Drug Education Forum for all to use.

The second part of the work was the development of a local 'Alliance in Drug Education'. This was designed to be used with external drug contributors who were encouraged to work within the 11 points of effectiveness.

Materials were all trialled and tested by schools before being used and commissioned work using 'Draw and Write' techniques informed the lesson content.

Community

One element of this component was an exciting and different part of drug prevention. This involved working closely with key local partners such as Trading Standards Officers and Police on reducing the availability of alcohol, tobacco and volatile substances to minors. Local areas developed their own plans in line with existing work and it has been a useful chance to bring demand and supply stakeholders together, often for the first time.

Choosing the schools

All Secondary Schools working towards National Healthy Status across 4 regions (9 LEA's) were invited to take part. Schools were chosen from this group randomly and then allotted either implementation or control school status. This gives us :

- ♦ 23 schools running the programme
- ♦ 6 control schools
- ♦ 4,500 pupil cohort
- ♦ 200 teachers trained
- ♦ over 2,000 taught Blueprint hours
- ♦ access to 9,000 parents

- ♦ 11 School Drugs Advisers
- ♦ 4 LEAs / DATs involvement

Feedback - positive

- ✓ teachers felt very positive about teaching PSHE
- ✓ pupils and teachers loved the quality of the materials
- ✓ pupils saw their teachers as credible deliverers of drug education
- ✓ pupils liked the 'questioning' environment
- ✓ pupils felt that the timing was right for their needs
- ✓ pupils liked the group work, the lively and friendly atmosphere
- ✓ created and the high level of interaction

Feedback - negative

- ✗ some pupils were very worried by their parents smoking patterns
- ✗ some pupils (and teachers) found the lesson pace tiring
- ✗ some pupils with low reading ages (6 / 7 years) found some aspects hard to read
- ✗ some teachers found it hard to follow a 'script' closely

Overall, this seems good news although it will be quite some time before we get the final results which will give us answers to 6 key research questions :

1. Is Blueprint a useful teaching resource as rated by pupils ?
2. What is the reaction of other professionals ?
3. Is Blueprint a useful teaching resource as rated by teachers ?
4. Is there evidence of an impact of Blueprint on substance use ?
5. Does Blueprint increase the quality and quantity of communication between parents and children in relation to drugs ?
6. What is the cost of the Programme ?

We will have to wait until 2007 to find out all the answers. In the meantime, keep an eye out for a series of briefings and training and development opportunities to discuss the findings so far.

References

- Dusenbury, L., and Falco, M. (1995). Eleven components of effective drug abuse prevention curricula. *Journal of School Health*, 65, 10. 420-425.
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