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## Janet Currie

# Using sporting themes to engage young males in health education lessons

This research involved a process evaluation conducted to gain teacher feedback on the implementation of a secondary health education resource kit. The study also sought to gauge how it was used in classrooms, and how teachers felt their classes reacted to it (Nutbeam & Bauman 2006, p.41).

The free kit was originally designed and distributed to help support the teaching of secondary classroom lessons in the personal development and health curriculum area. Containing a DVD and lesson resources for the Lower and Middle Secondary school, the kit offered a range of activities and learning strategies able to be used together or separately, depending on the needs of the teacher. The original programme primarily used sports, such as rugby league and other popular recreational pursuits, for the purpose of encouraging students to consider their own behaviours and attitudes towards leading a healthy, balanced lifestyle (Currie 2011a, 2011b).

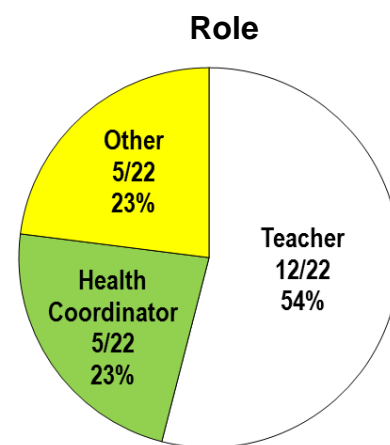
A survey form was developed and distributed to the kit's 214 recipients. The form focused on gaining teacher feedback regarding their experience when using the resource and consideration of the kit's general acceptability. Twenty-two recipients of the kit returned the reply-paid addressed questionnaire, giving a response rate of 10.3%. The kit was also trialled by 27 pre-service Health & Physical Education secondary teachers in schools located throughout the Sydney metropolitan area during a 4-week practice period throughout May 2014, in consultation with a Supervising Classroom Teacher.

### Survey Findings

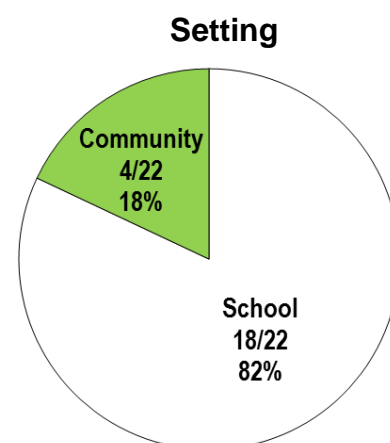
#### The Programme's reach and recruitment

The 22 survey respondents consisted of 12 Teachers (54%), 5 Health Coordinators (23%), and

5 (23%) identifying as working in 'Other' roles (Indigenous Tutor, Links to Learning Coordinator, Community Education Counsellor, Deputy Principal and a Student Support Officer).



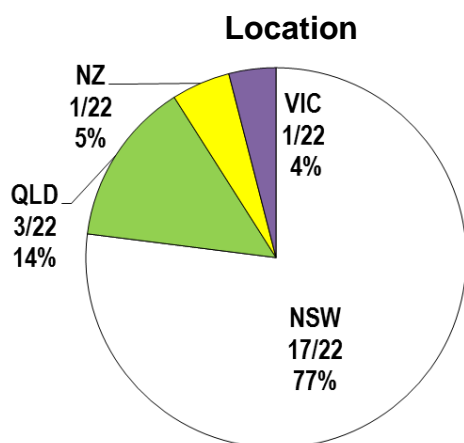
When asked to describe their audience when using the kit, 'Schools' were the main location nominated by 18 respondents (82%), with 4 (18%) nominating 'Community' settings (Suspension Centre with the Department of Education; Corrective Services; Mission Australia; Player Welfare).



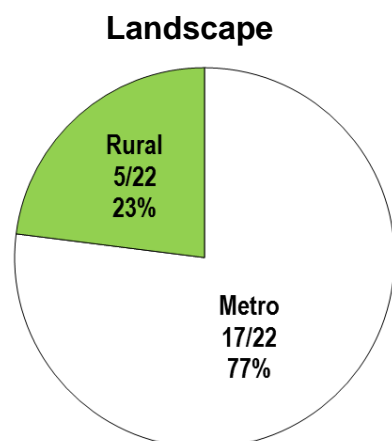
The main reason given for wanting to receive a copy of the kit was to use it for 'classroom teaching' purposes (8/22 or 36%). Nine (41%) respondents

said they wanted to use the kit to specifically motivate a student or group of students, with 3 having the kit referred by a colleague, and 1 each either using it for Anti-Bullying or Low-Literacy for Adult Males programmes.

Survey respondents were mainly from NSW (17/22 or 77%) and Queensland (3/22 or 14%), Australia. One survey respondent each was from Victoria and New Zealand, with no other regions represented.

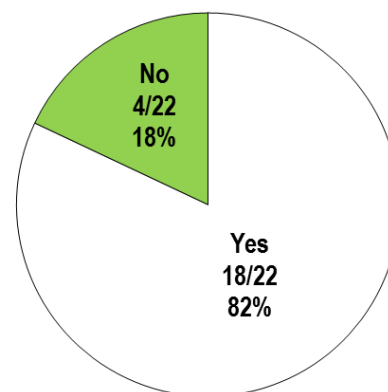


Seventeen respondents identified their setting as being located in Metropolitan or Urban locations (77%), with five stating Rural (23%). No respondents identified as being from Remote locations.



When asked if the kit had been utilised at their school or setting, 18 respondents said 'Yes' (82%), with 4 stating 'not yet'. Of the 4 individuals who had not implemented the resource, 2 said it was due to "no time", 1 "planned to during the following school term", and 1 said it "didn't match their demographics".

### Used the kit?



### Degree of programme implementation and satisfaction with kit contents

Of the 18 recipients who did receive the resource:

- 17 said they had used the DVD (94%);
- 12 the Lower secondary resource (67%); and
- 11 the Upper secondary resource (61%).

It needs to be remembered that the kit was not originally designed to suit nor support every aspect or strand area of the Australian Health syllabus.

### General feedback

When asked for general qualitative feedback of what the respondents thought of the whole resource ("What do you think of the whole resource?"), the comments were overwhelmingly positive. The most common response was related to "engaging" students:

*The resource was great. Worked well to engage students.*

*Excellent. ☺ Motivating, inspiring and gives my class positive direction.*

*Detailed lesson plans with great progression.*

*It was great and I was able to use it in the classroom as a way to motivate sporting (and other) students to think about achieving both academically and spiritually.*

The other most common themes to arise included that the kit was "purposeful", that students "related to it", it was "visual", "motivating", "inspiring" and "can be applied to life in general". Typical comments included:

*Students relate to the role models and stars.*

*The resource engages students due to the nature of the sportspeople presenting.*

*Purposeful. Visual resources work for adolescents, particularly when football stars are supporting the message.*

*Students relate to the resource. Recognise the people on the DVD.*

*Using league stars to talk to the kids is very motivating - kids are engaged with the DVD.*

The kit was recommended as suitable for some “alternate” applications or uses. These suggestions included implementing the kit in senior primary Health classes or programmes, in anti-bullying programmes, and to specifically motivate a student or group of students.

**Rating of the various aspects of the kit**

Of the 18 survey respondents who used the kit, 100% found the quality of the overall resource to be of Good or High Quality<sup>1</sup>. The DVD scored the highest frequency of “High Quality” ratings awarded. No respondents rated any aspects of the kit as being poor quality [see ‘Kit rankings’ chart below].

**Do you agree that the kit achieves its goal of encouraging students to build healthy lifestyles and positive ways to find and achieve their dreams?**

There was a positive response to this question, with only a few not as sure and giving some agreement. The key reason that the resource was perceived as being able to positively encourage students was viewed as the effect of the role models portrayed. Students are able to “relate to” the players’ messages and sports theme:

*Yes. Clearly explained goals by football players who many of the kids idolise.*

*Most definitely – Powerful role models that encourage focus, vision, goals.*

*Relevance to students’ interests helps to focus skills and reinforces attitudes.*

*Yes. It covers a wide range of pressing issues.*

A teacher, working with a group of students in an alternate education programme for suspended students in a rural setting, relied heavily on the resource for implementing their classroom teaching:

*Yes, as rural students relate very well to this and at times it is the only thing they can relate to. We must look at other programmes like this. It engages all students.*

Effective health education materials will usually have the ability to cater for or be applied to a range of learner levels and abilities (AGDET, 2010; Brown, 2007). Very insightful feedback was also provided by an Education Officer working with Corrective Services NSW, in how the kit could also be used with adult groups who had special literacy and numeracy needs:

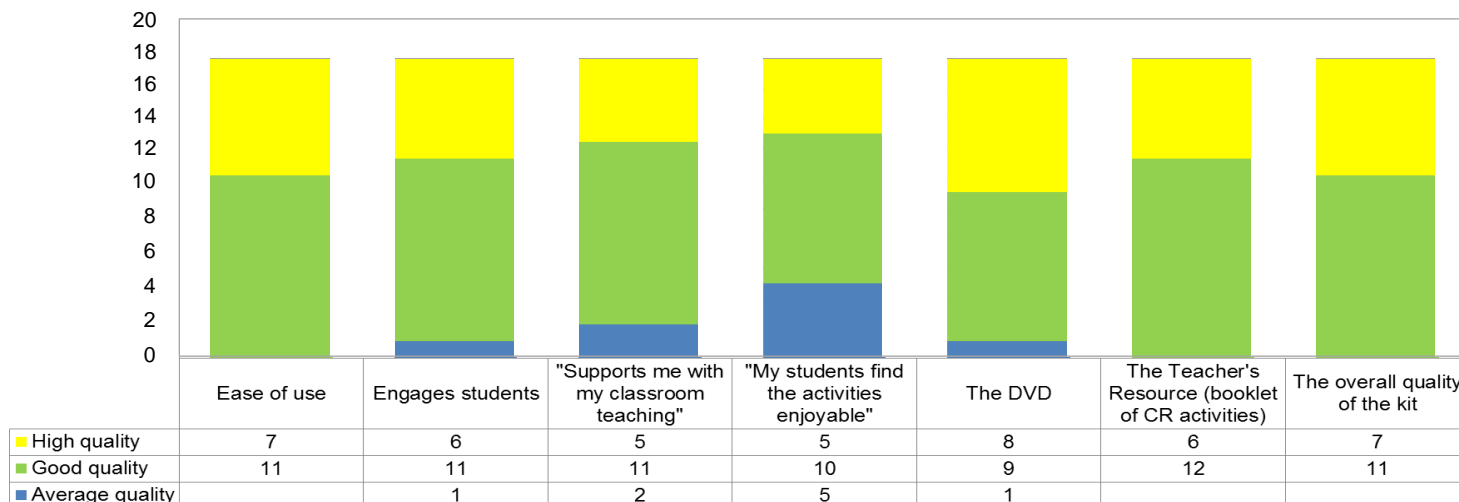
*I’ve found the DVD and kit very helpful in a number of courses run at Lithgow Correctional Centre with adult men with low literacy and numeracy skills. It has been a wonderful focus for goal setting and education/employment planning courses.*

**Suggestions for improvement**

The feedback suggested ways that the kit could be improved including:

- that it offer ideas for concurrently integrating or programming practical or outdoor PE activities and lessons;
- aligning or including a mapping table with the new National Curriculum (e.g. match any of the resource’s Main Ideas with those sub-strands and focus areas as released in the Australian Health & Physical Education Curriculum and its relevant Scope and Sequence);
- have even greater digital functionality;
- a system of regularly updating the players highlighted;
- include examples of the hard training and rehabilitation processes that players go through both in competition and in recovering from injury – the mental and physical sides;
- develop separate Teacher and Student Manuals so the teacher’s version contains suggested answers and main ideas covered from the syllabus.

**Kit rankings**



<sup>1</sup> No ‘Very High Quality’ category was available for ranking

### Ability to engage male students

When asked “How do you rate the overall ability of the kit to engage male students?”, the feedback received was overwhelmingly positive, including:

*All boys school – was a great resource to engage boys.*

*Boys identify with the sportsmen well.*

*Fabulous – I use this solely as my course outline.*

*Most of the boys play football here – helps to engage (also with the girls).*

*Students relate well to it. A lot of students achieve using this.*

*Very good. It engaged non-league sports players as well as players, and the more ‘intellectual’ kids were also able to get something out of it.*

There were 2 comments in this section questioning the kit’s broader applicability and acceptance by female students, for example, one respondent noting, “Females were not that interested (Junior 7-8 girls)”.

### Components of the kit found to be most helpful

When asked if all sections of the Teachers Resource or DVD are helpful; what part/s of the syllabus or programme in particular; plus any suggestions; the typical categories of responses included:

- All sections – in particular the resource’s application to teaching messages about self-esteem, self-awareness, tolerance, resilience, empowerment
- The DVD
- A programme designed to motivate and encourage boys
- Goal setting
- Anti-Bullying units - healthy lifestyles and resilience classes
- Transition to adulthood and league camps
- Use with health education classes for special needs students.

### Programme materials

Teachers were asked whether the actual materials (DVD, The Teacher Resource and its contents) used in the classroom were considered to be of high quality and able to produce active learning. Did the activities taught stimulate learning or engage students? Are they of high quality? Any suggestions?

When evaluating the use of the resource in the classroom and whether it is perceived as enjoyable, the main themes to arise from feedback and comments received on the

materials from 27 pre-service teachers trialling materials in the classroom included:

### Materials from the kit consistently rated as most enjoyable:

- the games e.g. bingo, were generally a feature that kept a class engaged and focused, especially for any students who might normally find it hard to understand health concepts and written information.
- activities well received by classes and provide a good stimulus for discussions.
- able to motivate the “less engaged” or “at-risk” students to levels not noticed before.
- active participation inherent in the activities – participation levels and satisfaction rated highly.
- Intellectual Quality – able to support learning focusing on higher-order thinking, involving understanding and communication of substantive concepts, skills and ideas.
- ability to modify the examples to suit the needs of female students e.g. use a dance theme if required.
- reliable and easy or simple to use.
- suits the increasing use of mobile devices e.g. off a school intranet.
- reinforce themes of practically assisting students to learn to create a positive outlook in life and drive towards an ambition or goal.

The ‘learning by doing’ or active learning aspect was effective in helping students achieve more positive retention of the information. It was noted by teachers as being strongly correlated with approaches to teaching and learning related to intellectual quality such as higher-order thinking and substantive communication. The varied teaching approaches and activities were also cited as a means to appeal to a range of students.

The ‘Dare to Dream’ section from the Lower Secondary kit was recommended as a good starting point or basis to teach individual self-concept and creating meaningful, achievable goals. Females students commented on enjoying a particular worksheet because it allowed them to think and freely express positive self-perceptions, feel happy and boost self-esteem.

One teacher explained how the students’ response to her use of the kit was “overwhelmingly positive”, mainly due to the ability of sports to engage the interest of male students:

*Using the game of rugby league and different athletes of the game in a number of the activities is a powerful tool, which*

is a clear contributor to students, particularly male, participating and engaging in these lessons.

### Aspects considered not as enjoyable or needing improvement:

Suggestions here included:

- a perception amongst a few teachers at 'all girls' schools that they are not able to relate to rugby league themes as well as boys, who can instead be quite excited to engage and talk about it.
- reduce the number of words on some of the worksheets so not overwhelming to any less capable students.
- Players, team uniforms and game clips needs some editing to update and retain currency.

### Reasons the kit was not implemented or to a lesser degree:

- Constraints faced by the increasing use in schools of "pre-packaged" course readers or student workbooks already printed and available for pre-programmed use in every lesson. When used as a supplementary tool in coordination with the workbooks, one teacher found this enhanced the overall educational experience and depth of learning by students. Some teachers modified the kit contents to suit their own specific audience.
- Predominantly female or non-English speaking background students less familiar with football. Some users held a pre-conceived perception that a high degree of football-specific background or knowledge was required in order to implement the kit.

## Discussion and Observations

A number of findings come out of the survey although the small (10%) response rate limits the generalisation of the results. Key findings:

- 1) It was widely used by these respondents.
- 2) It was favourably viewed as an inspirational tool by these respondents.
- 3) The activities were well received and accepted by the classroom.
- 4) Some gender bias was reported from girls who could not associate with the footballers.

Pirbhai-Illich (2010) has shown that when teachers relate classroom work to the students' out-of-school activities and interests, they achieve greater success in attaining a higher level of student engagement and authentic learning, particularly with male students.

Taylor & Lorimer (2003) found that using sporting themes and related games in health lessons permits teachers to spark more readily

student's interest and promote an active learning style. This helps engage male students, creating a classroom environment beneficial to boys and helping decrease educational disparities in academic achievement.

Clark (2012) suggests that boys also tend to learn best when they are allowed to engage in active learning strategies, for example role plays, debates, games and group work. It is recommended that teachers accept restless behaviour and noise as long as boys are on task. Building opportunities for physical activity or fun movement and sound within the lesson increases boys' motivation and skill development. Active learning strategies commonly used in health education and featured throughout the kit; such as role-plays, debates and investigations; are meaningful ways to engage boys in learning because they enable boys to actively question and explore (Harmin 2006).

Munns et al. (2005) carried out research which helped uncover practices within the classroom that enhance the way boys relate to the teacher and their peers. They recommended similar active learning approaches be used, with tasks drawing on the competitive and achievement-oriented nature of boys, linking learning to authentic contexts such as friendships and most popular recreational pursuits.

The resource kit was originally designed to help encourage students to build healthy lifestyles and positive ways to find and achieve their dreams. It would also be worthwhile to conduct an evaluation within schools and classroom settings. The evaluation would investigate any positive effects that may be demonstrable in building ongoing levels of student motivation, goal setting, self-esteem, tolerance, respect, value clarification or decision-making skills, as a result of implementation of the kit. This could examine links between the knowledge and understanding gained from the kit, with a student's own attitudes, values, life experiences or behaviours. There is potential for further research to examine the role of introducing sporting themes in health lessons, in particular for aspects of personal growth and empowerment, and making healthy lifestyle decisions for now and in the future.

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## Education and Health

The journal, published by SHEU since 1983, is aimed at those involved with education and health who are concerned with the health and wellbeing of young people. Readership is worldwide and in the UK include: primary; secondary and further education teachers; university staff and health-care professionals working in education and health settings. The journal is online and open access, continues the proud tradition of independent publishing and offers an eclectic mix of articles.

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## Education and Health Archive

Each issue of the journal, published since 1983, is available via the archive. There are several simple indices that help to identify articles by keywords; year/issue number; author surname and article title. It can be seen that some contributors have had a number of articles published and there are a range of topics that have been covered over the years. Sometimes a contributor will update their article or develop points raised by another contributor. The pages on the website, that have been provided for the Education and Health journal, usually have the highest number of 'reads' across all pages on this Internet site.

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*"The (SHEU survey) helped us to prioritise where we needed to be in terms of PSHE education. We delivered assemblies based on the evidence as well as curriculum development, and dealt with whole school issues – particularly in regard to pastoral care. The answers received to the question on the survey Who are you most likely to approach if you needed help worried staff as teacher was not a popular answer. Subsequently the staff asked themselves why this had happened and what needed to be done to address the issue. There was more emphasis on wider aspects of PSHE education delivery, which needed more attention. To summarise, the (SHEU survey) allows the PSHE department to assess the impact of teaching and learning and modify future lessons accordingly. It allows our school to look at whole school issues such as the extent to which the pastoral care system is meeting the needs of our pupils. It helps us to do need analysis of our pupils. It helps to provide important evidence for SEF / the extent to which we are meeting wellbeing indicators / National Healthy School standards."* Secondary School Head

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