

Road safety: the vital but neglected subject

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Pupils in the secondary age-range are more likely than primary-school children to be involved in road accidents, yet road safety education has a much lower profile at the secondary level. It is argued that teacher education should place a much higher emphasis on road safety; the majority of student teachers feel it is important, but only a minority feel confident to teach it.

As part of my work as Development Officer for road safety in Devon I have been engaged recently in a research project at Exeter University looking into student teachers and road safety education.

A series of recent Transport and Road Research Laboratory reports carried out at Reading University (see References) have indicated that although road safety is included in some way in most schools it is dependant largely on outside speakers such as police or road safety officers. The findings implied that teachers were poorly motivated or poorly prepared to teach road safety lessons themselves.

The same surveys showed that about 90% of both primary and secondary head-teachers think that schools have a responsibility to teach road safety, and that road safety education should be included in initial teacher training. At least half believe that initial teacher training should include a core programme of road safety education for all students. This recognition by teachers of the importance of road safety education is also shared by parents and health care professionals who rank road safety as one of the most

important topics to be taught in health education (Code & Redman, 1987).

Most primary schools are very conscious of their responsibilities in relation to road safety, although few actually have a road safety education policy. However, secondary school pupils experience very little road safety education in spite of the fact that they are involved in more road accidents than any other age group. In a recent five-year period (1983-1987) in Devon, for example, there were 3,262 reported casualties among youngsters aged between 11 and 16. Young people aged between 10 and 19 years represent 15% of Devon's population, yet make up 33% of road accident casualties.

Student teachers and road safety

One of the most recently produced TRRL reports (Spear & Singh, 1989b) investigated the state of road safety education in teacher training programmes and found that only 12% of those questioned included road safety in teacher training courses. The survey enquired into the views of tutors in half the colleges where

road safety education was taught. In my own survey I have looked at student teachers themselves and their views about teaching road safety.

A total of 153 students from two local teacher training institutions took part in a questionnaire survey which I conducted during February and March 1989. The sample included both primary and secondary students following BEd and PGCE courses. Many subject disciplines were represented in the group including a number of PE and Maths students. Mature students were included in the survey, many of whom were also parents. However, the greatest differences in views were between primary and secondary students, reflecting the fact that primary teachers tend to regard road safety as a normal part of classroom work whereas secondary teachers find more difficulty in assimilating this topic into the curriculum. This fact becomes particularly apparent in Table 1.

Finding a place in classroom teaching

Main subject Interestingly enough, the 42% of primary students who had received road safety education since attending college were more likely to fit it into their main subject lessons than those who had not attended such a course. In answer to an earlier question, it became clear that all the students who had received such training had attended one of the courses organised by myself in which workshop sessions on road safety had been run in different subject disciplines. This had

Table 1. The percentage of students who responded that they were 'likely' or 'very likely' to include road safety in their teaching. (The other categories were 'not sure', 'unlikely', and 'very unlikely'.)

Points of inclusion	Primary	Secondary
Main subject lessons	18	8
Tutorial sessions	26	50
Personal, social and health education (PSHE)	84	55
Cross-curricular project work	58	20
Outdoor education (e.g., trips)	96	72
Assemblies	64	49

been done explicitly to prove the point that road safety needs to form a natural part of normal classroom teaching.

Tutorial sessions as such only really exist in secondary education so this would explain the discrepancy between primary and secondary students' responses.

Personal, social and health education

Most primary students would regard PSHE as part of their normal teaching whereas fewer secondary teachers would feel this to be the case. Nevertheless it is encouraging to note that in answer to a later question on the importance of teaching PSHE, 89% of primary students and 60% of secondary students considered it important or very important to teach PSHE to their pupils.

Cross-curricular work Although 58% of primary students thought it likely that they would include road safety in cross-curricular project work, 44% of secondary students were unsure about this and 36% thought it unlikely that they would include road safety in such a project. Possibly a secondary student might not see such projects as part of the secondary school curriculum, and this would explain the small percentage of secondary students responding positively to the question. From personal experience, however, I would suggest that many secondary schools, particularly those involved in TVEI or similar pre-vocational courses, are most keen to establish cross-curricular team work in school. Topics such as road safety offer much potential in this context.

Outdoor education seems to be the most

Table 2. The percentage of student teachers in the 'strongly agree' and 'agree' categories in answer to the following statements about road safety education.

Statement	Primary	Secondary
It helps prevent road accidents among pupils	89	89
It gives pupils positive attitudes about their own safety	87	77
It fits into my own subject teaching	16	10
I am trained for it	9	6
It is an appropriate topic for my pupils	80	47
I feel confident to teach it	48	29
It is an important topic in PSHE	94	80

likely context in which students see the importance of including road safety. In pilot work with students, trips abroad were often mentioned as occasions for teaching road safety. Undoubtedly today's students and tomorrow's teachers are all too conscious of their legal responsibilities; headline-hitting disasters such as the Land's End tragedy and reports of skiing accidents in the Alps force teachers to consider safety aspects seriously before undertaking education visits. However, in spite of the publicity afforded to such occurrences, young people are more likely to die or be seriously injured on their way to school and near to their home than on a well-organised school trip. If teachers leave road safety until the occasion demands its consideration, many more lives will be needlessly lost.

Assemblies The assembly is often seen as an appropriate time and place to mention road safety. Yet research has shown that 'one-offs', even from talented expert speakers, have very little lasting effect on a young audience. This is particularly noticeable in whole-school assemblies where it is impossible to give road safety advice appropriate to specific age groups or individuals, and the message may be lost, totally misinterpreted, or forgotten.

Obstacles to teaching road safety

In spite of the low status of road safety in most schools, 89% of students agreed that road safety education helps prevent road accidents among pupils (Table 2). In 95% of road accidents human error is the major contributory factor, so it is

logical that education together with appropriate skills training is the prophylactic to the epidemic of road accidents among young people. Table 2 also shows, however, that secondary students were less certain about the appropriateness of the topic for their pupils or their own confidence in teaching it.

One of the main aims of my work was to identify possible obstacles to the teaching of road safety especially in secondary schools. From preliminary findings and the evidence of responses to questions in the survey, lack of training and confidence are the biggest barriers to teaching the topic. As one student commented, "we need tuition on road safety in our degree course". This statement was amplified by another student who spelled out the need for "more training for students to give confidence and knowledge on road safety within our training and lectures".

When asked to supply reasons why they might not teach road safety in school, students identified lack of time and place in the curriculum and lack of training as the most common reasons. However, there was an interesting correlation between students believing that pupils might not approve of road safety being taught and those who gave several reasons for not teaching the topic. Students avoided giving pupils' disapproval as a reason for not teaching road safety, but it became apparent in the responses to another question that secondary students were less likely than primary students to think that pupils would approve of their

Table 3. The percentage of student teachers who included the following among the three most important groups of people whose opinion would influence their decision to teach about road safety. (The other groups were: student teachers, teaching colleagues, road safety officers or police, local journalists, your own family, and other.)

Opinion of	Primary	Secondary
Headteacher	83	83
Pupils' parents	80	66
Pupils	46	61

teaching road safety. Moreover, when asked to rate in order of importance those people influential in their decision to teach road safety, the discrepancy between the primary and secondary students' view becomes even more pronounced (Table 3). Thus the importance of the pupils' opinion of road safety may be of crucial importance to the secondary student teacher, and this area deserves and requires further research.

Summary

Despite the discrepancies between primary and secondary student views, this survey has uncovered positive attitudes about road safety education. However, if students are to teach the topic in school they need to have the benefit of some training. They need to feel confident

The **HEALTH RELATED BEHAVIOUR QUESTIONNAIRE** service to schools is now in its 11th year of use by upper middle and secondary schools.

Some schools have now used it several times, obtaining a longitudinal profile of their year groups. Other schools have benefited from local group surveys organised and funded by Health Authorities or LEAs.

For a sample questionnaire and support materials, apply to the Unit.

that the topic has real relevance to their pupils – especially in the secondary school – and that the work will be appropriate and demanding enough to sustain enthusiasm and interest while worthwhile learning and attitude development takes place.

References

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