

'Smoking and Me': a resource for teachers

Elsbeth Gray & Philip Gammage
Universities of Bristol & Nottingham

'Smoking and Me' was published by the Health Education Authority in the autumn of 1987, and was a major part of the work of the HEA's Smoking Education for Teenagers project (SET). A formative evaluation of 'Smoking and Me' demonstrated that it has been well received by both teachers and pupils, and it is hoped it will become a valuable resource for smoking education. This article describes 'Smoking and Me' and some of the thinking behind it.

'Smoking and Me' is a *teacher's guide* to five lessons on smoking for 12-13 year olds, designed to be used at the end of the first year or the beginning of the second year in secondary school, or the equivalent year in middle school. It would be appropriate as a half-term unit in health education, social education, or tutor group work, and requires no specialist knowledge on the part of the teacher. The lessons focus particularly on:

1. The social consequences of smoking.
2. Peer, family, and media influences on smoking.
3. Role-play and group-based activities to develop and practise skills to resist smoking.

Much of the work is done by the children in groups where group leaders, chosen by the pupils themselves and guided by the teacher, lead discussion, role-play, and decision-making activities. Emphasis is placed on recognising and practising skills for managing social situations where smoking occurs.

Approaches to smoking prevention

The traditional approach to smoking education has tended to emphasise teaching the facts about the long-term health risks of smoking, assuming that acquired knowledge of these facts will be a sufficient deterrent. But such factual information alone is not enough, and there are other important messages that smoking education needs to convey *in a manner that has meaning and importance for adolescents*. It has to be recognised, too, that the same message may affect different individuals in different ways.

The adolescent years are an important time for social learning to take place, and as smoking is very much a social activity for young teenagers smoking education programmes could, with advantage, take note of the social values of teenagers. There is much evidence which suggests that between the ages of 11 and 13 conformity to group pressure is at its peak, but if children can be helped to achieve an understanding of how they are responsible for their own actions, then the 'conforming' influence of the peer group might be resisted.

Group work in 'Smoking and Me'

For adolescents, too, much actual learning takes place when they learn to establish their identities within the peer group. These social or peer groups which children move into as they approach adolescence have thus an important part to play in the socialisation of young people. Adolescents are likely to spend more time with their peers than with their parents, so the peer-group structures lend themselves as a valuable vehicle for learning. The peer group has much energy potential and, as a resource, can well be harnessed within the framework of the school curriculum. Hopson and Scally (1981) point out the benefits that can be gained from channeling what they call the 'peer dynamic'. Their comment that *well-prepared and well-managed small-group sessions have great potential for participants to learn about themselves and others* would appear to support an approach to a curriculum which is especially concerned with the social implications of one's behaviour.

An account of an interesting experiment by an educational psychologist in the north of England describes how primary school children helped others with language impairment to improve their social skills (Hurford, 1980); attention has also been focussed on children as teachers in the informal setting of a children's health club where, it was suggested, much can be achieved by such peer activity.

The group work on 'Smoking and Me' capitalises on the self-selected groups in which the group leaders, chosen by their peers, are responsible for co-ordinating the work of their groups. There is no question about the teacher losing authority in the classroom, though some teachers, prior to using the pilot version of 'Smoking and Me' in the classroom, expressed reservations about whether the children could handle such responsibility. But, as they reported to us, their fears were groundless. *Broke down my fear of introducing pupil-led group work and Although I was initially concerned at the responsibility being put on group leaders it worked very well, particularly because every member of the group*

became involved were examples of the comments made.

Contents of the Guide

We emphasise that it is a *teacher's guide*. It is divided into five sections:

1. *Introduction*, with notes on choosing groups and leaders.
2. *Lesson outlines* with guidelines for both teachers and group leaders. The main points of each are given, and it is clearly stated where the teacher provides support and direction. The five-lesson programme looks like this:

Lesson 1 – Looking at some facts

Estimation of number of smokers
Negative aspects of smoking
Why do 12-year-olds begin to smoke?

Lesson 2 – How to say "No"

Estimation of number of smokers
(continued)
Resisting pressures to smoke
How to refuse a cigarette

Lesson 3 – The right to smoke?

Rights of non-smokers
Reasons given for smoking
Countering arguments of smokers

Lesson 4 – Free to choose?

Influences to smoke
Smoking models – parents, siblings, media
Anti-smoking collage

Lesson 5 – Any conclusions?

Individual commitment
If I don't smoke, it will be because
.....

3. *Background material*. This contains figures relating to teenage smoking in the UK and other information to support the approach to smoking prevention taken in 'Smoking and Me'. Evidence from American studies is quoted which points to the importance of the prevention of smoking *early* in adolescence, though recent figures (Goddard 1987) might suggest that prevention programmes should be implemented even earlier.

4. Also included is some basic information about the results of the *forma-*

tive evaluation of 'Smoking and Me', which was carried out between May 1985 and February 1987 in 75 schools in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Data was obtained from 215 teachers' questionnaires and 5371 children's questionnaires, and of the latter 940 were analysed. Overall it was well received, 93% of teachers viewing the materials favourably, and 77% of pupils expressing general approval of the lessons.

5. The section on *useful information* includes a general fact sheet on smoking, some facts from the Avon Prevalence studies carried out in 1983 and 1985, a list of useful addresses for further resources on smoking education, and suggestions for further reading.

Conclusion

We hope that 'Smoking and Me' will be taken up and used by more teachers, many of whom have seen the potential of this approach for other areas of substance abuse (perhaps we should say *even more* teachers, since at the pilot stage 'Smoking and Me' was already in every LEA in England and Wales and in every Board district in Northern Ireland). Teachers, HEOs, and LEA Advisors have commented on the valuable strategies employed, and this point also emerged very markedly in the formative evaluation. We regard 'Smoking and Me' as another resource for smoking education and we hope that its use will encourage other non-smoking policies and activities in schools.

The HEA Smoking Education for Teenagers Project is now finished. Regrettably, funding is not available from the HEA for us to develop a Health Risks Curriculum, which had originally been planned as a sequel to 'Smoking and Me'. However, we are looking for other support for work in smoking education: the most recent national survey by the OPCS (Goddard, 1987) reveals that there is much yet to be done.

'Smoking and Me' is an A4 wire-bound book containing 64 pages, which may be photocopied as needed. The price is £7.25

including postage from the Health Education Authority, Hamilton House, Mableton Place, London WC1H 9TX. The Teachers' Advisory Council for Alcohol and Drug Education (TACADE) will be holding training sessions with these and other materials: for more information, contact them at Furness House, Trafford Road, Salford M5 2XJ (061 848 0351).

References

- Hopson, B. & Scally, M. (1981). *Lifeskills Teaching*. McGraw-Hill UK.
 Hurford, A. (1980). How peer tutors can help. *Special Education*, 7, 33-35.
 Goddard, E. & Ikin, C. (1987). *Smoking among Secondary schoolchildren in 1986*. OPCS, Social Survey Division: HMSO.

Contact Elspeth Gray, School of Education Research Unit, University of Bristol, 22 Berkeley Square, Bristol BS8 1HP - (0272-303030 ext M388).

FAMILY PLANNING ASSOCIATION EDUCATION UNIT

16-17 November 1988 (Wed.-Thur.)

Sex education in schools — methods and resources

This course is the first in a new series examining the many issues around sex education in schools. We are including courses for those working with young people with physical disability or mental handicap.

Please send for our programme (and also for our new resources catalogue which includes materials for teaching sex education and a new handbook for teachers) to the FPA, Education Unit, 27-35 Mortimer Street, London W1N 7RJ (Telephone 01-631 0555).

JUST A TICK brings pupils, parents, teachers, and governors into curriculum planning. The cost of a pack (primary or secondary version) is £2.50. Write to the Unit, or telephone for more information.