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# A New Approach to Tobacco Education using Interdisciplinary Learning

As a result of national education and health policy a new approach to tobacco education was developed in a local authority area in Scotland. The Tobacco Education Project used interdisciplinary learning to enable primary school children to explore a range of issues related to tobacco. The process for creating the project, practitioner learning and recommendations for future practice are described.

### Substance Misuse Education

National education and health policy in Scotland recommends new approaches to substance misuse education. Interdisciplinary learning should be used to enable children to develop a broader understanding of drug issues (Curriculum for Excellence: Health and Wellbeing, Principles and Practice, 2009; The Road to Recovery, 2008). The implications are that teaching staff from different curriculum areas have responsibility for delivering substance misuse education. In Social Studies, children should learn about the origins of drug use and the global and ecological impact of drug production. Through Expressive Arts, drama should enable children to explore their views of substance use.

In addition the Scottish Government's Equally Well Report outlines action to address health inequalities. Recommendations include the continuation of Curriculum for Excellence and action to reduce smoking among young people (Equally Well, 2008). Within the local authority area, an Equally Well Test Site Area of Tobacco Control was established due to high smoking prevalence of 40.2% in the area (Equally Well Test Sites, 2008). A priority was the development of tobacco education with primary schools in the test site.

### Interdisciplinary Learning in Substance Misuse Education

The literature review found some evidence on the use of interdisciplinary learning in substance misuse education. Drama was effective when young people were involved in interactive learning about substance misuse (Stead et al, 2005; Spratt and Shucksmith, 2003; Starkey and Orme, 2001). Young people valued drama inputs more when they were part of the drama process rather than observing a performance (Stead et al, 2005). An analysis of a smoking education programme, which included learning about the tobacco industry, described positive outcomes (Johnson et al, 2009). Media literacy skills as part of a substance use curriculum enabled young people to understand the links between the media and drug use (Austin and Johnson, 1997 and Huston et al., 1992 cited in Flay, 2000).

Research on substance misuse education in schools in Scotland however found that the majority of programmes focused on the health effects of substance use (Stead et al, 2009). A needs assessment showed teaching staff faced challenges when integrating tobacco education into other curriculum areas (Spratt and Shucksmith, 2003). In a UK review of drugs policy (RSA: Drugs - Facing Facts, 2007), it was suggested that young people should perhaps learn more about global issues that include how the drugs trade affects the communities where it comes from and its effects on those communities where the drugs are used. The review makes several recommendations including, "...We recommend that drugs education should be focused more on primary schools and less on secondary schools...". One report, on research with 16+ year olds, found

that an emphasis on the drugs supply chain heightened awareness, "...young people who were relatively indifferent to the illegality of drugs were thoroughly deterred by the thought that either the 'mule' who brought a consignment of cocaine into the country or the dealer who brought a 'deal' into the club might have carried it in a body cavity." (COI: The Drugs Supply Chain, 2003). However, the report did not consider school drug education programmes. Some practice exists on incorporating learning about global drug production issues into the school curriculum. Shared Responsibility involves young people examining the ecological and social impact of coca production in Colombia (Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency, 2008). The programme received media attention and has been promoted as an approach to substance misuse education in schools (Seith, E, 2011).

While national policy recommends interdisciplinary learning in substance misuse education, the literature review did not find significant research evidence on this approach. This supported the pilot and evaluation of a new approach to tobacco education using interdisciplinary learning.

### **The Tobacco Education Project**

As part of the Equally Well Test Site a working group was established to re-design tobacco education in three primary schools in the area. Coordinated by the Senior Health Development Officer, the working group's membership included head teachers, teaching staff, an arts education officer and health improvement staff. The working group developed the content of the Tobacco Education Project which was targeted at children in Primary Six, aged nine to ten years. The project involved:

- Lesson Plans: creation and delivery on a range of topics related to tobacco using different learning methods including participatory learning, internet research, writing and mathematical tasks
- Experiential Drama: facilitation of a drama day where children met characters from scenarios related to tobacco including a Glasgow Tobacco Lord, a Slave Trader and a Tobacco Advertising Executive.
- Drama Workshops: children created

scenarios related to tobacco and presented these in short sketches at a parents' and carers' event.

- Engagement of Parents and Carers: children surveyed family and friends to gather views on smoking. A parents' and carers' event was held to share the survey results, see the children's drama sketches and promote the Stop Smoking Service.

### ***Trade Winds, Learning about Tobacco, An Interdisciplinary Learning Resource Pack***

Project materials were collated by the working group in the online resource pack *Trade Winds*. Exemplifying Curriculum for Excellence guidance, the resource includes materials on:

- the history of tobacco
- the cost of smoking
- media literacy and tobacco
- tobacco production in developing countries
- peer pressure
- smoking prevalence in homes and communities
- addiction and the health impact of smoking
- extending learning through the arts.

### **The Tobacco Education Research Project**

As part of the MSc in Advanced Professional Studies a piece of classroom based research was undertaken to identify children's learning and their views of the Tobacco Education Project and any impact on choices about tobacco use. The methodology used was a self-administered questionnaire in the classroom setting. One class of pupils from one school was selected for the research. 27 respondents completed the questionnaire.

#### **Children's Learning**

Respondents were asked to write three statements which described their learning from participating in the project. This generated 81 statements for analysis. 51% of the 81 statements described the health effects of smoking. This included the long term health

effects of smoking, links between smoking and death and the immediate impact of smoking:

*"A lot of people die from smoking and is tragic."*

*"If you smoke you will get yellow nails, yellow teeth, bad breath and smelly hair."*

There were several topics which were part of the project that respondents did not include learning on. There were no statements about peer pressure, tobacco advertising, the impact of smoking on developing countries, or their parents' and carers' views of smoking. Only 6% of the statements mentioned their learning from studying the tobacco trade and the history of tobacco:

*"I learned...How it [tobacco] moves around the world."*

### **Respondent's Views of the Topics**

Respondents were asked to rate the different topics. 'Smoking and adverts' was the highest rated topic. 63% of respondents rated this topic as very good. The topics, 'growing tobacco in poor countries' and 'pressure to smoke from friends' were less favoured; 41% of respondents rated both these topics as okay and poor. Respondents were asked to select a favourite topic. Of the 22% of respondents who rated adverts as their favourite topic, the majority said that this topic was their favourite because it was enjoyable and fun:

*"It was very interesting and the adverts were very funny and catchy."*

45% of respondents said the reason for selecting their favourite topic was because they had learned new things about tobacco and the information was interesting:

*"Because I did not realise they [cigarettes] were so dear".*

*"Is because it told you how they would have to travel back and forward to get more [tobacco]."*

### **Respondent's Views of the Learning Methods**

A series of questions aimed to gather respondents' views of the learning methods used during the project. Drama and watching DVDs were the highest rated activities. Between 74% and 89% of respondents rated the drama activities as very good. Respondents

were asked to select a favourite activity and to give a reason for their response. 78% of respondents rated experiential drama as their favourite activity. 50% of respondents said that the reason experiential drama was their favourite was because it was fun:

*"It was funny and they put on some good shows and we were always taking part."*

### **Impact on Tobacco Use**

A series of questions aimed to identify any impact of the project on tobacco use. The questions explored people respondents had spoken to about the project, how they would react if someone they knew started smoking, and respondents' views on smoking. 93% said they were less likely to start smoking and 7% said it did not change their view about smoking. As there was no pre-evaluation before the start of the project it is not clear whether respondents' views of tobacco were changed as a result of the project. Respondents were asked how they would react if someone said they wanted to start smoking. 93% of respondents gave a negative aspect about smoking as a reason not to smoke. The majority of responses were related to the health impact of smoking. 41% of respondents described the short and long term health effects of smoking:

*"Don't do it if you start you can't stop and it can make you're breathe [sic] smell, your hair and clothes smell and you can get many illnesses"*

*"Don't because it ruins your life such as it gives you cancer".*

### **Impact of Interdisciplinary Learning**

The research aimed to identify how respondents viewed the use of interdisciplinary learning in tobacco education. The results show that only a small number of respondents recalled learning on topics related to the social, economic and global impact of tobacco use. When describing how they would respond if someone they knew started smoking, none of the respondents mentioned the impact of tobacco production on developing countries as a reason not to smoke. For example, as part of the project children learned about the harm caused to children working on tobacco farms in Malawi, yet this was not given as a reason not to smoke. It may be the learning methods used for

global tobacco production did not engage the children as effectively as other topics such as smoking and advertising. The topic may also have been viewed by respondents as less relevant compared with health issues. Respondents' focus on the health impact of smoking may be related to other factors. Previous tobacco education programmes are likely to have focused on the health effects of smoking. Respondents may have been exposed to messages about smoking through anti-smoking media adverts and campaigns. While the research project showed that children valued drama inputs, the additional contribution that drama made to the children's learning and views of the project was not identified.

### Learning and Recommendations

The Tobacco Education Project has illustrated the benefits of national policy to help implement change in substance misuse education. A small amount of funding from Equally Well covered the costs of teaching staff to be released to create the lesson plans and the experiential drama input. The expertise and commitment of all those involved in the project made a significant contribution to the project success. In line with the principles underlying Equally Well, learning from the Tobacco Education Project has been shared with practitioners involved in tobacco education across Scotland (Equally Well Test Sites: Evaluation, 2011). The Trade Winds resource is being used by schools in the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde area and is available from ASH Scotland. Inputs on the resource are also part of the Primary Education course at the University of Strathclyde. While the Trade Winds resource considers historical issues related to tobacco in the Glasgow City area, it is of relevance and can be adapted for use by schools across the UK.

With the continuation of Curriculum for Excellence, there would be benefit in further research to look at the impact of using interdisciplinary learning in substance misuse education. The benefits from using experiential drama in substance misuse education would also benefit from further research.

Project Materials

Trade Winds is available from:

<http://www.ashscotland.org.uk/projects/youth-development/information-for-professionals>

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