DAVID HYDE
A realistic objective for drug education

Have asked to be shown shocking images, and teachers should ask themselves — and their pupils — why they need or wish to be frightened.

Drug use involves people + environment + drugs, which adds up to consequences. These consequences can be both good or bad, depending on variations in each of the three components. For example...

1. Is the user alone or in a group?
2. Is the use experimental or regular?
3. What is the mood of the user?
4. The drugs themselves: what sort is it, how much of it is used, and how is it used?

Drugs education may need to cater for the different levels of drug use, which are...

1. Abstinence — avoiding any illegal or medical use of drugs.
2. Experimentation, first-time use.
3. Recreational or reasonably controlled regular use.
4. Problem use, dependency.

Therefore its objectives, at least for the first three levels, should include...

1. Developing a wide range of skills, from communication to coping, assertiveness, and decision-making.
2. The acquisition of accurate scientific information on drugs.

Enabling young people to become aware of the beliefs and attitudes of themselves and others, and the ways in which these may affect behaviour.

The development of a positive self-concept and self-esteem, with increased empowerment for making self-determined healthy choices.

Many of the popular and preferred learning materials are fundamental to skills-based — for example the My Body and Health for Life projects (primary), Skills for Adolescence (11-13), the Alcohol Education Syllabus (11-19), and Drugs Wise (14+).

Drug use and misuse, as a health education issue, has been located quite prominently in the National Curriculum and has been placed initially within the programmes of study for science. It is to be developed through all four Key Stages, thereby reinforcing the cross-curricular principle that it should be part of a developmental programme.

Key Stage 1 states that children should develop a variety of communication skills; they should be finding out about themselves, they should be introduced to ideas about how to keep healthy and about personal safety, and they should recognise the role of drugs as medicines.

Key Stage 2 states that they should continue to develop and use communication skills; be introduced to the fact that while all medicines are drugs, not all drugs are medicines; and begin to be aware of the catastrophic effect on health resulting from an abuse of drugs.

Key Stage 3 states that pupils should begin to make personal decisions and judgments based on their scientific knowledge of issues concerning personal health, well-being, and safety, and that they should examine ways in which the healthy functioning of the human body may be promoted and disrupted by lifestyle. The use and abuse of medicines and drugs, and the physical and emotional factors necessary for people's well-being, should also be included.

Key Stage 4 includes the ability to communicate, to apply, to make informed judgments and decisions. Pupils should have opportunities to consider the effects of solvents, alcohol and other drugs on the way the human body functions.

Substance use has been included as part of the Statements of Attainment for Attainment Target 3 — 'Processes of Life'.

LIFESTYLE

Is this a realistic objective for education? Alcohol abuse is not just a teenage problem, but one which affects every age, occupation, and social group in the UK. However, it has been much easier to focus on the drinking behaviour of teenagers and young adults, and we have been helped to do this. Schools have been encouraged to alter and delete the level of under-age drinking. Home Office statistics show that alcohol is involved in many crimes, especially those of violence.

Regular use of alcohol is the norm for many, if not most, adolescents as young as 13, and since the law enables alcohol to be consumed by all but the under-18s, drinking by this age-group is endorsed on one hand and dis...
approved of on the other. The young are bombarded with subtle messages about drinking alcohol, so abstention is not only a very difficult route to take, but perhaps an unrealistic one to enforce.

Moderate use of alcohol can be harmless, and the public needs increasingly to be made aware of healthy levels of consumption. Education about the sensible use of medicines in 5-9 year olds is the groundwork for learning about — and practising — sensible drinking in youngsters of 11 and older.

SENSIBLE

Knowing your limit is not the same as being able to hold your drink! The former involves healthy and sensible behaviour, while the latter is a recipe for possible ill health. It is not the aim of alcohol education to encourage young people to drink, but to encourage them to drink wisely if they decide to do so, or to offer alternatives.

A survey of Lincolnshire 11-15 year olds carried out in 1988, involving over 5,500 pupils, revealed that 48% of 11-13 year olds and 61% of 15 year olds consumed alcohol on a weekly basis. As might be expected, the amounts consumed increased with age, as did the frequency of drinking.

While general drug education must be a part of the social education of our young people, there is a strong case for focusing upon alcohol use — but within the context of the former process. Secondary-school resources such as the Alcohol Education Syllabus, That’s the Limit, and various audio-visual and games materials should be available from Health Promotion Departments, with All About Me, Think Well, Drugs Education and the Primary School Child, and the Health for Life Project being suitable for primary schools.

Contact David Hyde, Education Department, Lincolnshire County Council, County Offices, Newland, Lincoln LN1 1YQ (0822 552222).

We were pleased to receive a copy of a new magazine for teachers of physical education, dance, and outdoor education. Called Action and Balance, it is edited by Stephen Pain, Inspector-Organiser for Physical Education in the London Borough of Wandsworth. Stephen notes that ‘there are some excellent professional journals and magazines about sport in various settings, but none of them caters for the whole range of issues in physical education in a way that is accessible to everyone involved’.

The first issue of the 24-page magazine contains articles on Handball — a game for PE skills, Active games for primary children, Could you save a life?, Practical lesson ideas, and many other things. The place of PE in the National Curriculum is also discussed in an interview. It is an attractive colour production with good meaty content, and we hope it prospers.

The magazine is due to appear quarterly. The advertising and subscription address is 16A Barkby Road, Leicester LE4 7LF (0603-460722).