NAZIH FAKHER-ELDIN

‘You 2’: a sex education action plan for schools

In this article, we discuss the You 2 project, which aimed to introduce sex education into the curriculum of secondary schools in Milton Keynes. The project was led by Milton Keynes Health Authority, in collaboration with the Health Education Service, and was part of a bid to create a research-in-action service. The project was successful in its bid for funding and led to the development of a sex education action plan for schools.

Research in action

Milton Keynes Health Authority, through the Health Education Service, was successful in its bid for funds to create this research-in-action service. In order to ensure the project’s success, the Health Authority established a multi-disciplinary management committee to oversee the work of the project. The membership of this committee is shown in the box.

The You 2 project

The project was designed to address the needs of young people in Milton Keynes, particularly those who were not accessing sex education services in their schools. The project was funded for a period of two years, during which time the committee worked to establish a new service to provide information and advice on contraception to young people.

The You 2 committee consisted of:

- A consultant in Public Health Medicine
- A senior officer from the LEA
- The deputy director of Social Services
- An assistant in Adolescent and Child Health
- The Area Youth Officer
- The Locality Nurse Manager (Family Planning)
- The District Health Education Officer
- A Clinical Psychologist
- A Senior Researcher and the Manager of British Pregnancy Advisory Services

This article was written for the purpose of helping all those who are interested in the provision of sex education, be they teachers, governors, or educationists. It is by no means a blueprint but only an illustration of a successful attempt in this difficult area.

The first step was for the co-ordinator of the project to meet and negotiate with all the key policymakers of the various schools, usually the head teachers, the health education co-ordinators, and representatives of the governing bodies. The aims of these negotiations were as follows:

- To agree an action plan for the sex education in their school.
- To give an opportunity to establish the capability in their school co-workers on the project (two doctors, a health visitor, a youth worker, a community development worker and a counsellor) and at the same time to investigate the level of commitment of the school to the project’s proposals.
- To agree an action plan for the sex education in their school.
- To establish a communication mechanism.

These events provided invaluable input as they enabled the schools to get the expertise and advice they needed to improve their sex education. The project was successful in its bid for funding and led to the development of a sex education action plan for schools.

LDA SEX EDUCATION IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

The LDA sex education programme is designed to help primary schools provide sex education to their pupils. The programme is structured to help teachers deliver age-appropriate sex education in a way that is relevant to their pupils.

The programme includes a range of resources such as

- Workshops for parents, governors and teachers
- Active cross-curricular lesson plans
- Photocopiable pupil worksheets
- Guidance on sex education and the law

The programme is delivered through a series of workshops, which are designed to help teachers develop their own sex education programme. The workshops cover a range of topics, including

- How to deliver age-appropriate sex education
- How to involve parents in the process
- How to address sensitive issues

The workshops are delivered by experienced sex education trainers, who provide practical advice and support to help teachers feel confident in delivering sex education.

ORDER FORM

Name:
Address:
Telephone No.:
Postcode:

Please indicate:
N copies of Knowing Me, Knowing You
12.95 each

Signed:
Date:

For orders under £50, please add £5.00 for postage and packing. For larger orders, please contact LDA, David K. Duke Street, Welbeck, Camb, PE1 2AE.
A task from 'Taught not caught'. The discussion arising from this exercise could include factors for effective communication with parents, reasons for parents trying to control and discipline children's lives, parents' different expectations for boys and girls, and ways in which young people can try to make parents understand their point of view. Published by LDA, Wisbech, Cambs.

The fourth session centred on the issue of responsibilities within relationships and caring for self and for partners. This was facilitated by an exercise on raising awareness of the pressures exerted by friends and partners and their effects on our actions. The exercise dealt with ways of coping with these pressures and with the consequences of taking any action including that of saying 'no'.

At the end of this session a 10-minute video ('Contraception — ready or not?) was shown. This video talks about facts, myths, and attitudes to contraception in a witty and light-hearted way.

Family planning

The final session dealt with family planning and its meaning to the pupils themselves. Discussions ranged over why people space their families, reasons for delaying the start of a family, why people may choose not to have children, and so on.

Last but by no means least the 'contraceptive kit' itself, which includes all the various contraceptive options, was made available for a 'hands-on' session. Pupils were encouraged to ask questions, which they did, including some on the relevance of various methods to them at this stage of their lives.

After each session the pupils were given 'homework', for example to think about what makes it easy or difficult to talk to someone, or to find out who provides family planning in their area, at what times and at what venues. A series of cartoons were handed out showing scenes of real parental-teenage crashes in which speech bubbles had to be filled. An example is shown above. It is from 'Taught not caught' — strategies for sex education by The Clarity Collective, published by LDA, Wisbech, Cambs (0223 357744).

A week after the programme ended, the pupils were asked to evaluate the input of the You 2 project by means of a questionnaire. This was divided into two sections. The first part asked how useful (or not) and how enjoyable (or not) each session had been. The second part consisted of a series of open-ended questions:

What did you like best?
Was there anything you did not like?
Is there anything you would like to be talked about in future?
Any other comments?

On the whole, the vast majority (80%) of the pupils found each and every session useful and enjoyable, but there were a number who were very sceptical. Some commented that it was quite hard for them to come to terms with expressing their feelings to colleagues. Others thought they knew the topics anyway and had discussed some issues with their teachers, parents, or others.

Popular

As for general issues in the evaluation of the programme as a whole, we learnt that the methods of delivery were very popular, whether they involved discussion, games, or 'hands-on' material.

When they were asked what they did not like, the answers varied from nothing to everything. Some commented on being embarrassed to talk, others said that some boys tried to take the mickey out of others, some found it hard to talk about private or personal issues, and others found the questions a little too simple.

The answers to what else should be included in future sessions were somewhat surprising. Top of their list were homosexuality, AIDS, and abortion. Some wanted more sessions on communication skills, assertiveness, debates, and accurate details of helping agencies and helplines.

The comments received at the end of the form, needless to say, were mostly complimentary. Those illustrated here were chosen arbitrarily by the writer.

I would like to see this done for every 3rd year.
Please more sessions in 4th, 5th, and 6th years.
It should be a proper lesson in schools like Maths and English.
It is useful for later in life.
It made us more confident because not everyone could normally talk about that kind of thing.

This was an example of good cooperation between governors, teachers, parents, and an outside agency working together on a sensitive topic in education. The governors excused their duties in a sensible way. The teachers enjoyed the experience and continue to provide sex education in the school. The parents were aware of what their children were learning and were prepared for any questions or queries. The You 2 project learned that all the hard work put into planning, organizing, and delivering this programme was immensely worthwhile.

Immediately afterwards, two other schools were able to benefit from this work. In one of the schools the project delivered the same programme but each lesson was 45–50 minutes over a period of five weeks. In the other school, lessons were of 50 minutes but the programme was spread over six weeks.

In the light of the changes imposed by the National Curriculum, a successful sex education programme must not only be properly planned and co-ordinated across the curriculum, but it should involve governors, parents, teachers, and (most importantly) pupils.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Margret Albrecht and the staff and pupils of the school involved.

Contact Dr Nazid Fahker-Eldin, You 2 project, The Bakehouse, 6 Church Street, Wolverton, Milton Keynes MK12 5JN.

Dear Parents,

Great news, there is a place on the health and wellbeing of our community. We are currently being given grants on what we can do to improve the health and wellbeing of our community, to help prevent globalisation, etc. However, we are sure you are aware, meaning a much healthier environment.

It is therefore our attention at You 2 project, the school, in health awareness. During the week beginning December 21st, we will be making the support of you and other local agencies including You 2, and will help us educate the children in the world in relation to health. So that you may be a little more informed about the work of You 2, we have arranged a session on November 23rd at 7.30, which should be held of sufficient you all have the opportunity to become involved in a demonstration tutorial session.

Could we please, therefore, ask you to return the slip at the bottom of this letter to enable us to plan the evening accordingly?

We look forward to meeting we may of you as possible on November, and should you have any question in the meantime please do hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

Health checks