

Road Safety's place in health and social education

JOHN BALDING

'Tomorrow's drivers — the forgotten generation'

This was the title of the recent national course held by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents at Hythe, Kent. It was exceedingly well organised and fully attended, and the programme, which contained contributions from a wide variety of professional backgrounds, culminated in an enlightening session involving thirty pupils from local schools. Michael Rodd, the television presenter, chaired this session, which sought the views of these young people (aged between 15 and 17 years) on some of the statements that the experts had made over the preceding days.

The importance of motorcycling or car driving to these young people was immediately obvious. (We are all aware of the significance of passing the driving test — a really major milestone on the way to adulthood and increased independence.) However, Michael Rodd used some of the statistics produced in a separate talk by Philip Mullock (see page 00) to draw attention to the high probability of being injured in a road accident; he then invited the boys and girls to comment on this, encouraging them to draw on their own experiences. The status that ownership of a motorcycle gave a boy was abundantly clear; but the enhanced status enjoyed by a rider who had experienced and survived an accident was somewhat frightening. It became evident that a whole new range of activities opens up for a young person with his own transport, together with the opportunities for natural competition and the need to impress one

another, with ownership and driving behaviour. There is no need to point out that the image of personal status gained from the vehicle one possesses is not restricted to the young!

It is a great pity that more teachers were not present. Those engaged in health and social education could have gained a great deal from the insights and strategies presented at the course. Conversely, the presence of teachers would have helped many course members, who had vast experience of safety aspects and a sincere desire to help young people, but failed to achieve their potential impact due to a lack of understanding of the current secondary-school scene. Formal and informal contacts between teachers and these experts could be most profitable.

Safety education — have we got the right model?

It is abundantly clear that young people between the ages of 16 and 20 are at great risk of being hurt or killed on the road. Can secondary schools do more than they already are? The model that seems most familiar in road safety/traffic education isolates it from the rest of the curriculum as a special course, often for a small proportion of the school population — a point to which I shall return later. Within this course, the emphasis is on rules for good practice both in road behaviour and vehicle maintenance — take heed of road surface; inspect tyre treads; keep correct tyre pressure; check for loose nuts once a week; clean front

and rear lenses, and so on.

This model seems appropriate for a safety-conscious person who is motivated to learn good practice, and there are people who seek out this type of course, just as there are those who go on first-aid courses. The model takes for granted the presence of safety consciousness in the learner. However, the level of this consciousness depends upon the individual's degree of self-respect and respect for others; as well as upon his self-image. These dimensions of personal development are at the core of health and social education.

A profile of the young motorcyclist

From the vast amount of data that has now accumulated from the use of the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire, it is possible to look at relationships between behaviours. Prompted by an invitation to contribute to the ROSPA course, I extracted comparative data from a sample of 1,000 5th-year responses, using the question "Do you ride a motorcycle/moped?" 20% of the respondents declared that they did. The table present-

Behaviour	Motorcyclists?	
	Yes	No
No homework done last night	69%	52%
Never fasten seat-belt in car	56%	35%
Earn money	72%	61%
More friends of own sex	39%	50%
Spend money on cigarettes	44%	28%
Spend money on alcohol	61%	36%
No. in sample	40	160

A study of 200 5th-year boys from 4 Questionnaire schools in Berkshire and Buckinghamshire.

ed here is of a smaller sample from four schools in Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, which was used in my own contribution, but the figures for the larger sample are similar.

Several interesting points emerge

- (a) The motorcyclists are more likely to have done no homework on the previous evening (note that the Questionnaire is not administered on a Monday);
- (b) Responding to a question on seat-belt usage, 56% of motorcyclists declared that they never used a seat-belt as a passenger. For non-motorcyclists, the figure was far less (note that this question was asked before the recent seatbelt law);
- (c) The motorcyclist is more likely to be earning money from a paid job;
- (d) For close friends, he is likely to declare at least as many female as male;
- (e) He is also much more likely to be spending money on cigarettes and alcohol.

It should be pointed out that the number of female motorcyclists in this age range (15-16 years) is only about 3%.

This table, then, shows mathematical relationships between being a motorcyclist and behaving in certain ways. Correlations, indicating whether these relationships are likely to be real or just due to chance, can be performed by other analyses. No claim is made that motorcycling is the underlying cause of the other behaviours — but a picture of a young man seeking adulthood, independence, and perhaps an exciting image, is not hard to create. Nor is this picture unrealistic or undesirable. We were all attracted to the young motorcyclists attending the Hythe course, quite apart from the relevance of their contribution to its content.

The "homework type"

At this point, I should like to give another

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'Tomorrow's drivers'

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example of mathematical correlations between behaviours derived from the data bank. This is from eight schools in Yorkshire, and shows that the more homework a 4th-year boy or girl did on the previous night, the more likely he or she is to:

- (a) Clean teeth frequently;
- (b) Wash hands after using the lavatory;
- (c) Go to the dentist regularly;
- (d) Fasten the seatbelt, as a car passenger;
- (e) Not have much money to spend, but likely to save some of it;
- (f) Not be spending money on alcohol or cigarettes;
- (g) Spend money on school equipment.

The image created by this set of linked behaviours is very different from the foregoing one, and I rather suspect that the "homework type" is already safety-educated, and will seek out safety knowledge at the appropriate time of life.

Health/social education and the whole person

If one is organising a health and social education programme, the obvious and conventional strategy is to identify such components as diet, exercise, smoking, alcohol consumption, and — dare I say it? — use of the road. I believe, however, that time should also be given to exploring the significance of these behaviours in the whole life of the young person.

The arena provided by Michael Rodd for his young drivers was obviously helpful to them, and it was not focussed on "good practice" but on relationships with one another, with parents, and with the law; and also on social behaviour.

TACADE, the Health Education Project at Southampton University, and Life-skills Associates at Leeds University, are three current sources of teaching materials for use in the secondary school which use this health education/social behaviour perspective. These materials are used in core courses for all students, and, being attractive to teachers, are becoming more popular; but to what extent do they focus on being a road user? Ken Jolly, at Reading University, is currently developing materials specific to road safety, but will it find its way into health and social education courses, or will it be restricted to specialist areas?

One of the problems I see here is a political one. Development of educational materials depends upon funding, and the funding body (whether it be a bank, insurance company, or cosmetics manufacturer) naturally wants recognition and publicity. It may strongly influence the scope of the material being prepared, and it may want a separate slice of labelled curriculum in order to be satisfied, which could result in an isolated "package" seemingly unrelated to other aspects of personal development. Those fostering any aspect of safety education should, however, try to see it more as an important contributory ingredient of a larger section of the curriculum.