

Prevention of substance abuse in Portuguese Textbooks

Artur GONÇALVES, Catarina DANTAS and Graça S. CARVALHO

LIBEC/CIFPEC, University of Minho, Portugal

Graça S. Carvalho: graca@iec.uminho.pt

Abstract

The aim of the present work was to verify if school textbooks respect the national programme and to analyse how they approach the contents concerning the prevention of drugs abuse. Results showed that drugs are mentioned at the primary school: at years 1 and 3 (6 and 8 years old) but in a very superficial approach. At years 6 and 9 (11 and 14 years old) these contents are largely treated. Later, at year 10 (15 years old) only tobacco and alcohol are vaguely referred. Text and images generally fit the Biomedical model as far as the pathologic and preventive approaches are concerned.

Prevention of substance abuse in Portuguese Textbooks

Artur GONÇALVES, Catarina DANTAS and Graça S. CARVALHO

LIBEC/CIFPEC, University of Minho, Portugal

Graça S. Carvalho: graca@iec.uminho.pt

Introduction

Addictive substances as alcohol, tobacco and other illegal drugs, represent a serious problem to actual society. Young people, because of physical, psychological and social stages related to the process of growing, are very vulnerable to those substances. In this context, school plays a crucial role, as it may be the place where young students contact with this reality and fall in to that world or, in contrast, it may be the place where they became aware of this reality and become empowered to choose, in a responsible way, their own reality. The UNESCO has recognized the school as an important addiction prevention centre included in the global plan of the Health Education. So, at this stage it is important to analyse what has been done, what are the main problems and which is the most efficient model able of increasing the school success in this issue.

In the learning domain the didactic transposition refers to the knowledge selected or not to be taught (external didactic transposition) and to the way that knowledge is effectively taught (internal didactic transposition) (Clément, 2001, 2004). In effect, these two steps of the didactic transposition are extraordinary important because prevention of drugs abuse is an issue of high sensibility, as it involves the whole dimensions of today's life: economics, social and individual. Therefore it is pertinent to approach the three poles related to the conceptions construction, as they result from a dynamic inter-relation between the knowledge, the values and the social practices (Clément, 1998, 2004). Everyone who is involved in the educational system has his/her personal conceptions: those who define the national programs, the authors and publishers of school textbooks, teachers in the teaching and learning process and the students.

Without underestimate each one who is involved in this complex process, in Portugal school textbooks assume an important role as they are the most used didactic resource (ME, 2005). The aim of the present work was to see if school textbooks respect the national programme and to analyse how they approach the contents concerning the prevention of drugs abuse.

Methodology

The corpus of this study was composed of a total of 7 school textbooks of primary and secondary school on the topic Health Education analysed in Portugal.

For the textbook analysis it was used a grid constructed by the European FP6 STREP project Biohead-Citizen (CIT2-CT-2004-506015). For the grid construction two meetings of the Biohead-Citizen project were hold: the first in Algeria (6-10/05/05) and the second one in Malta (21-25/05/05).

The Health Education grid, among other contents, has specific tables for alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, where issues like: physical and psychological consequences, social problems related to the addict, healthy alternatives, institutions specialised in help are referred.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 – Smoke abuse information per school level

INDICATORS – SMOKE ABUSE	Year 1 (6 years old)	Year 3 (8 years old)	Year 6 (11 years old)	Year 9 (14 years old)	Year 10 (15 years old)
Unhealthy components of tobacco			I/T	T	T
Physical effects in the body: - respiratory tract - digestive tract - circulatory system - foetus disorders (of smoking mother) - lung cancer - other diseases		T T	I/T I/T I/T	T T I I/T	T T I/T
Psychological and behavioural effects: - anxiety - addiction (dependence) - others (specify)			I/T	T T T	
Social effects: - family disturbance: over-spending, children's illness - passive smoking - mortality rates - others (specify)		I/T	I/T I/T	I/T I/T	I
Anti-smoking campaign - information - educational action - legal rules - promotion of healthy habits - fear contents	I I		I/T I I/T I/T		
Environmental (and social) approach: - notion of pleasure during consumption		T	I/T		

I – Images; T - Text

Table 2 - Alcohol abuse information per school level

INDICATORS – ALCOHOL ABUSE	Year 1 (6 years old)	Year 3 (8 years old)	Year 6 (11 years old)	Year 9 (14 years old)	Year 10 (15 years old)
Physical effects in the body: - digestive tract - circulatory system - nervous system - foetus disorders (of alcoholised mother) - hepatic diseases (cirrhosis)		T T	I/T	T T T I/T	I I
Psychological and behavioural effects: - memory disturbance - loss of behaviour control - addiction (dependence) - others (specify)		I/T	T T I	I I/T T I	
Social effects: - family disturbance: over-spending, children's illness - mortality rates - others (specify)			I/T	I I	
Anti-alcohol campaign - information - legal rules - promotion of healthy habits - fear contents		T	I/T I I I	T I/T	
Environmental (and social) approach: - notion of pleasure during consumption			I/T	I	

I – Images; T - Text

Table 3 – Other drugs abuse information per school level

INDICATORS – OTHER DRUGS ABUSE	Year 1 (6 years old)	Year 3 (8 years old)	Year 6 (11 years old)	Year 9 (14 years old)	Year 10 (15 years old)
Examples of other drugs: - amphetamines - cannabis - cocaine - heroin - ecstasy			I/T I/T I/T I/T I/T	I T I/T	
Physical effects in the body: - digestive tract - circulatory system - nervous system - foetus disorders (of drug addicted mother) - transmitted diseases (AIDS, hepatitis) - other diseases			T T I/T T	T T I/T T	
Psychological and behavioural effects: - euphoria, (outgoing) - impaired perception of time - memory disturbance - loss of behaviour control - addiction (dependence)		T T	T T T I/T	T T T T	
Social effects: - mortality rates - others (specify)				I/T I	
Anti-drugs campaign - information - educational action - promotion of healthy habits - fear contents	I/T		I I	T I/T	
Environmental (and social) approach: - drug traffic - notion of pleasure during consumption			I T	I/T	

I – Images; T - Text

The analyses of the tables in the Health Education grids (tables 1, 2 and 3) show that these issues are treated in different school levels and with different approaches.

In primary school drugs are mentioned only in the years 1 and 3 (6 and 8 years old), but in a very superficial approach.

At the years 6 and 9 (11 and 14 years old) these contents are largely treated. Specific information in what concerns alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs is given, like physical, psychological and social effects.

In the year 10 (15 years old) in the discipline of Human Biology, these contents are almost totally ignored; only tobacco and alcohol are vaguely referred.

Text and images usually fit in to the Biomedical approach, especially in the pathologic and preventive models. It's also interesting to notice that information about institutions specialised in helping persons with alcohol, tobacco and other drugs problems are absent in all the school textbooks analysed.

References

- Clément, P. (1998) *Lá Biologie et sa didactique. Dix ans de recherches*: Aster (INRP, Paris),27,57-93.
- Clément, P. (2001) La Recherche en Didactique de la Biologie, *in*: P. Clément, H.-R. Dahmani e F. Khammar (coord.). *Didactique de la Biologie: Recherches, Innovations, Formations*. Actas do Colloque International de Didactique de la Biologie. Alger-Algerie, pp.11-28.
- Clément, P. (2004) Sciences et idéologie : exemple en didactiques et épistémologie de la biologie. *In* Aster do Colóquio "Sciences, Médias et Société" J. Le Marec & I. Babou (Eds), ENS-LSH, p.53-69.
- ME - Ministério da Educação (2005) Anteprojecto de Proposta de Lei sobre Manuais Escolares http://www.min-edu.pt/ftp/docs_stats/d_1131714424191.pdf, 21.12.05.