

Life Education – Making a difference

An evaluation for the Life Education Trust

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Appendix A: Adapting Life Education to fit with whole-school needs at Pounamu School

Introducing Pounamu School

Pounamu School is a decile 1 contributing school located in a large urban area. The roll includes approximately 400 students: about half identify as Māori, one-fifth Pacific, one-fifth NZ European, and one-tenth Asian or from another ethnicity.

The school's priorities are developing students' literacy and numeracy skills. Underpinning this is a focus on student health and wellbeing, and addressing barriers to learning such as poor attendance. The school serves a community that doesn't have a lot of financial resources and therefore is committed to providing extra support through initiatives such as a health clinic, Books in Homes, Fruit in Schools, and connections with the Kids Can Trust.

History and value of school involvement with Life Education

The Life Education mobile classroom had been visiting Pounamu School for more than 10 years, and all staff viewed Life Education as a valuable and integral part of their school programme:

Our relationship with Life Ed is very positive—it's a team... Life Ed is not an add-on—it's a critical part of what we do.

School staff noted that Life Education enhanced their school programme by “reinforcing important health messages”. To embed learning it was important that students got these messages more than once and in different formats. Staff valued the specialised knowledge of the educators and considered this complemented their generalist knowledge. They noted that students found the visits motivating because of the high quality of Life Education teaching practices and resources. School staff commented it would be difficult for teachers to have the same level of content knowledge or replicate the resources or high energy delivery of the educators.

The fit between Life Education and school practice

The fit between Life Education and schoolwide practices

School leaders considered that Life Education modules and their underpinning philosophies aligned well with school priorities, beliefs about learning, and approaches to curriculum planning. The student and parent community of Pounamu School came from a range of cultural

backgrounds which included recent refugees. Therefore, the school had a focus on fostering understanding of difference and celebrating different cultures. School leaders considered Life Education's strengths-based approach and focus on acknowledging the uniqueness of students fitted well with this focus.

The strategies Life Education advocated also aligned well with a schoolwide focus on positive and negative decision making and consequences. As part of this focus, staff were encouraged to model and reinforce strategies such as the use of "put ups, not put downs", and strategies students could use to address bullying such as use of "I" statements. Staff described other ways their approach and Life Education were aligned. For example, school leaders noted that educators presented students with information and discussed ideas in a way that did not criticise home practices. This approach was also a focus at the school.

The fit between Life Education and the curriculum

At Pounamu School the curriculum plan included a two-yearly rotation of health topics and each class covered about two main health topics a year. The Life Education visit was incorporated into the curriculum plan at the start of each year and was timed to coincide with a health topic. In the past the school had focused on the food and nutrition strand in one year, and self-esteem or social relationships in the next. The health team used the Life Education learning intentions ("We are learning to..." (WALT) statements) to assist in planning units and to put together a selection of resources for teachers to use.

During the last couple of years, school leaders had been developing a more flexible approach to planning topics that enabled them to respond to student or community needs. Over the course of 2007, school staff observed that there had been an increase in bullying and racial taunting in the playground. A community consultation had also highlighted that the parent/whānau community were concerned about children's anger management skills. School leaders raised these concerns with the educator when she visited the school to discuss the 2007 programme. They then worked together to tailor the Life Education visit to support the school to address these areas. For the Years 5/6 students who were targeted in this case study, a programme that consisted of two sessions was developed that focused on questions such as "What is a good friend?", and "What is bullying?" This programme combined aspects of the Life Education modules: *Friends* and *It's great to be me*. The educator and school staff also developed a student booklet that was tailored to fit school needs. The booklet included some of the resources from the Life Education student booklets, school resources, and other resources from the educator about cultural differences.

The 2007 health topic which coincided with the Life Education visit fitted with this focus. This topic was entitled "I am me and you are you, and we are both special" and was about valuing yourself and others. A social studies unit on celebrating cultures was also connected to this topic. In 2006, the school had used a similar approach to develop a tailored Life Education programme to fit with their whole-school focus on healthy eating.

Alongside the curriculum plan, the school also had small daily health topics that change weekly and were timed to suit current events. These were woven into daily classroom practice. Examples included: firework safety; sun protection; and managing friendships.

Integration of Life Education with classroom practice

The two Years 5/6 teachers we talked to described a number of connections between their school and Life Education's approach. Teachers considered it important that students' different cultural and home backgrounds were acknowledged in their classroom programme. They had an ongoing focus on exploring similarities and differences between student groups, and positive ways students could interact and work co-operatively. Teachers also considered their schoolwide focus on decision making and consequences aligned well with the Life Education focus, and commented that Life Education reinforced a number of the strategies that were part of school practice. Both teachers focused their discussions about positively managing social interactions around these sorts of strategies. During the year they referred back to Life Education as it was an "anchor" for students.

As well as these ongoing activities both teachers used Life Education as a "starter" activity for an in-depth focus on the health topic related to the Life Education visits. In 2007, both teachers worked through the adapted student booklets. Teachers were very appreciative of the way this tailored booklet supported the school focus on bullying and gave them activities to follow up in the classroom. As one said, "You can go for ages on the book... It's like giving children their Christmas present!" In between the two Life Education sessions one class analysed the poem in the booklet about similarities and differences between people. The teacher was impressed by how students looked beyond simple physical differences to discuss differences in values and emotions. Post-visit activities also included discussions about bullying and the meaning of a number of quotes from the educator and Harold which students wrote in their books such as, "Be honest, but not hurtful", and "Every action has a consequence". Teachers also used some of the activities in the student booklet for homework tasks and sent home students' work for parents to view. A visit from a community policewoman, which covered similar areas, was also timed to coincide with the health topic.

The impact of Life Education on student and staff learning

Teachers' views on the impact of Life Education on students' learning

Staff commented it could be difficult to untangle the impact of Life Education visits because they were so intertwined with school practice. But, given this, they had a clear sense that students remembered Life Education messages and content, and observed that, as students got older, these messages built in complexity. Teachers considered that this supported students to develop their knowledge and vocabulary around key areas.

School staff described a number of occasions they had observed changes in students' knowledge or behaviours they considered were partially attributable to Life Education. School staff tended to ascribe different types of impacts to the different Life Education modules. They connected gains in students' content knowledge to modules about body systems, nutrition, and healthy eating. For example, teachers noted that as a result of Life Education students gained "a reasonable knowledge about internal body parts and organs" and the impact of different foods and substances on these organs. Teachers noted that, during the 2006 Life Education visit, students had become interested in the information they gained about the effect on the brain of the fat content in food. Overall, as a result of the school focus on healthy eating which was supported by Life Education, teachers noticed changes in students' knowledge about healthy food options and students talking about, and taking onboard, messages about healthy choices.

Different types of learning were mentioned in relation to the 2007 module, which spanned the self-esteem and social relationships strands. Teachers reported that this module had supported students to think more deeply about different personality qualities and why people bullied, and had enhanced students' existing strategies for avoiding bullying and peer pressure. One teacher noted students found the visit empowering and now had a clearer sense that "It's alright to get out of trouble...it's ok to say you're being bullied." The other described how students had used strategies promoted during Life Education to effectively manage a difficult classmate.

In general, in 2007 as a result of the school focus on positive behaviour, and the Life Education visit, staff considered the number of incidences of problem behaviour had decreased. This view was supported by data from the playground incident book which showed a decrease. The only new instances were from students who were new to the school. Overall, all the school staff interviewed considered the specially tailored Life Education module had been particularly successful in meeting the needs of the school.

Teachers' views on the impact of Life Education on their practice

As well as having an impact on students' knowledge or skills, all the teachers interviewed reported that Life Education had impacted positively on their knowledge or practice. Some noted that Life Education contributed to their content knowledge: "They teach us as well!" All considered observing Life Education sessions supported them to keep up to date or reflect on their practice. Teachers noted that being part of a session contributed to their knowledge about: positive behaviour management strategies; the range of strategies that could be used instead of whole-class teaching; how to sequence teaching; or how to reinforce key messages. In general, all school staff considered the teaching practice of educators and the Life Education resources to be of a high standard.

Possible improvements to Life Education practice

Staff noted that in the past Life Education had been very responsive to feedback and hoped they would continue with their programme of updating resources. In general, staff found it hard to

suggest ways Life Education practice could be improved. As one teacher said: “Their practice couldn’t be improved, and their resources are the same.” One teacher noted that the focus of the revised curriculum on community consultation and school-based curriculum development posed some challenges for Life Education. Whilst acknowledging that it would be a lot of work, this teacher suggested that Life Education could aim towards “pitching at communities rather than just curriculum”. To do this, Life Education would need to research the characteristics of the range of NZ student groups such as Māori, Samoan and other Pacific cultures, and refugee communities. Life Education could then incorporate more discussion about healthy food from these cultures, and focus on their different social practices. In this way educators would be able to make stronger links to different school communities and highlight some of the positives of each culture within these communities.

Another teacher considered that making the modules more flexible would better meet school needs, for example, she suggested some of the topics in the Years 7–8 modules were appropriate for Years 5–6. Examples included peer pressure or pressure from siblings in relation to drugs.

Students’ perspectives

Students’ perspectives on prior Life Education visits

During our visit to Pounamu School we talked to a total of nine students from two Years 5/6 classes. Both student groups had a clear recollection of the Life Education visits from previous years. In general, students seem to find it easier to recall Life Education visits than classroom activities. In regard to the 2006 school and Life Education focus on healthy eating, both groups talked about what they had learnt about healthy food. Some students described how, during the Life Education visit, they had read the labels on food packets (for energy, sugar, and fat) and played a game to categorise food in the food pyramid groups:

...the good stuff’s at the bottom...(that’s vegetables, fruit) and the bad stuff’s at the top—you only eat a little a day...(that’s sugar, ice-cream, burgers, coke, lollies...)

Students also learnt about: how much food you are supposed to eat to fuel your body; how your muscles and body organs work better if you eat healthy food; the strongest muscle called “gluteus maximus”; what happens to your body when you run around; and that you need oxygen. One group talked about the follow-up activities that occurred in class with the Life Education booklets and other similar resources such as a “Healthy lunches” book promoted by Tana Umaga.

As a result of the 2006 Life Education visit the students in one group described how they had started to do food packet reading at home. Students in the other group reported they were eating more vegetables as a result of their school’s and Life Education’s focus on healthy eating.

Students also commented on the cumulative impact of Life Education visits in that they went every year and got similar messages. An example given was Harold’s message that we are all unique and “we all have different personalities”. Students noted that it would be boring if we were all the same.

Students' perspectives on learning prior to the 2007 Life Education visit

Prior to the 2007 Life Education visit, when asked about the current whole-school focus on bullying, students in both groups noted that there had been “heaps of times” that students had teased other students about “how they look or what colour they are”. The two groups talked about messages teachers gave them such as: “Don’t tease other children that are darker than you”, and “Respect others a bit more”. Both groups of students could clearly describe the strategies suggested by staff for dealing with bullying and noted that they were reinforced by “all the teachers”. The strategies students named were those in the WITS framework:

- walking away
- ignoring bullies or not talking back
- the use of “I” statements such as “I don’t like it when you....”
- getting the duty teacher.

Students could also describe some of the activities they undertook at school that supported them to gain more understanding of each other and learn about positive behaviour. One group had learnt a lot about their classmates’ cultures and countries from a recent social studies unit on celebrating cultures. Students had been shocked to hear from classmates about how they had lived in war zones where violence and guns were the norm, and from other classmates who had lived in places where they did not have hot water, electricity, or birthday parties. Students noted this unit had given them more understanding about each other’s cultures and a greater appreciation of their current situation in New Zealand.

The other group described how their class had a number of systems which supported them to interact positively with each other. One was a buddy system to welcome newcomers and the other was a “friendship circle” during which either students or the teacher could bring up incidences that concerned them. Students noted the friendship circle gave them a vehicle to voice their concerns and taught them strategies to deal with situations; for example, they had learnt how to use “I” statements and how to apologise to each other. As well as these more formal classroom activities, students also noted they talked to each other about the sorts of behaviours they expected from a good friend. As an example, one group stated that a good friend is someone who stands up for you, and if you get bullied, they help you. A friend is not just nice to you because they want to eat your lunch.

Most students noted they had tried to use school strategies, such as “I” statements, either with their classmates or siblings. In general, they had mixed success. Some had more success at school, others with their siblings: “When my brother is mean, I say: ‘I’m not listening’.” A couple noted that they were doing less bullying as a result of the school focus.

When asked if they got information about dealing with bullying and how to make friends from other places, some students noted they did not talk about these things at home. Others said if they got bullied they told their parents who talked to their teacher or the principal. Some noted their parents gave them generic advice such as: “If your friends are not nice, just make new ones” or

“Mum told me it’s a good idea to have both girl and boy friends—to get on with both.” No student mentioned their parents suggested different strategies for managing social relationships.

Students’ perspectives on the 2007 Life Education visit

In regard to the 2007 Life Education visit, again students had a clear recollection of the various activities they undertook and the messages that were being promoted. Overall, students were very enthusiastic about the sessions. Students in the two groups described how they had: watched a video about bullying and discussed different ways of dealing with bullying; discussed peer pressure and “what could you say if someone asked you to smoke”; talked about their similarities and differences with a buddy; learnt how it was important not to make assumptions about people’s backgrounds; stuck cards on the wall that had supported them to think about the characteristics of friends that were important; talked about different body parts; and played games.

Students found it easier to describe the activities they undertook during Life Education than to talk about the strategies that were promoted, and some students noted that already knew about some of the strategies or information: “most of us know about friendships...and friends’ likes and dislikes”. But, overall, students talked about how they had come to a greater realisation of the **range** of strategies they could use to deal with peer pressure and bullies. As one said: “[I learnt that] if someone says your mum’s fat...there’s **heaps** of ways to deal with that.” Students also noted they had learnt more about the reasons why people bully: “Sometimes they pretend to be strong...some bullies are soft inside.”

The messages students took on board from this Life Education visit were: be kind, respect each other’s feelings, and try not to bully; be honest and trustworthy and don’t lie; try not to judge people by their looks as this does not always give you accurate information about their background; we are all special; and it is good to keep fit and eat healthy food rather than junk food or salt.

Synergies between Life Education and the classroom

Students said the Life Education strategies and messages had been reinforced in the class work they did near to the two Life Education visits. Both groups recounted that their teachers had talked about bullying in class. In one class the teacher told a story about bullying and students analysed a poem about being the same or different from other people. Both classes also had a visit from a policewoman who talked about similar themes including bullying and keeping yourself safe. Both groups were very positive about the student booklet that they had worked through in class. They talked about how they had to write different strategies for dealing with peer pressure about smoking and stealing and fill in pages about their likes and dislikes.

Students had a range of views on the similarities and differences between the classroom and Life Education. Both groups thought the environment in the mobile classroom was different from their school classroom, and more exciting. They enjoyed talking to Harold and liked the lights and smells and physical activities: “I liked the fitness we did—like you had to stick things on the

walls.” Some wanted to do more of these activities in class, specifically watching and discussing videos. One group of students noted that “in class we write all the time” and described the Life Education visit as:

It’s way different...you learn new stuff...it’s different ‘cause you can have fun while you learn...it’s more verbal.

The other group commented on some of the similarities between Life Education and the classroom. In this class, similar to Life Education, the teacher set up a lot of opportunities for students to share ideas with each other.

As well as identifying similarities and differences in the *ways* they learnt, students also identified similarities and differences between school and Life Education focuses or messages. Students noted that their school and Life Education had similar approaches to addressing bullying, but placed weight on different messages. One group noted that school messages were more about doing good work (achievement) and classroom behaviour. In contrast, Life Education focused more on feelings, getting on with friends, and eating healthily. Both groups thought that, overall, the Life Education approach:

really helped us to learn...I liked how we talked about bullying and how to get out of it, and how we are different cultures and things like that!

Transferring what was learnt during Life Education

Students noted that the recent Life Education visit had supported them to continue trying new strategies to manage relationships with their classmates. As an example, both groups described what had happened to a new student who picked fights. One group reported that during the Life Education sessions, they had learnt “lots of things to say to him” and trying out these ideas had resulted in improvements in his behaviour. The other group noted a similar change: “He’s going well now! He’s behaving appropriately!” Like their teachers, students considered there had been a recent decrease in bullying. Some had also tried using the strategies, or ways to avoid peer pressure, with siblings. One student, who had been offered a cigarette by her sister, recounted: “My sister asked me if I wanted a puff, and I said no!”

Summary

At Pounamu School, all the school staff and students we talked to were extremely enthusiastic about past and recent Life Education visits. In particular, staff were appreciative of the fit between Life Education and school philosophies and practices, and how the educator adapted the modules to meet their current needs. As a result, all considered Life Education had been highly successful in supporting and reinforcing school focuses. In general, staff valued the high quality of the Life Education teaching practice and resources:

There's lots of things that are really good [about Life Education practice]—that's why the children really love it... I take my hat off to them... I just really appreciate the style [of teaching]. It's really about using the kids as much as possible.

Although very impressed by Life Education, and how it motivated students, school leaders cautioned that the strategies promoted by Life Education were only likely to have an impact if they were reinforced by teachers. Interviews with students supported this view, and suggested that the closeness of the fit between Life Education and school practices supported students to learn content knowledge as well as strategies to improve their health and wellbeing.

In the future, staff at this school were planning to continue their approach of tailoring Life Education to fit with current needs. Senior staff noted that in 2008 they would probably revisit their 2006 focus on healthy eating choices as this was a continuing issue in their community. But, if a different need became apparent, they would adapt their programme as they had done in 2007.

Appendix B: A fit between school and Life Education practice at Valley School

Introducing Valley School

Valley School is a decile 7 contributing school in a small town. This town serves a rural area, and many students are bused to school. The roll includes approximately 315 students. Most identify as NZ European, with about one-tenth identifying as Māori or from another ethnicity. Student turnover is high, but the school has strong community involvement, and long-serving staff.

Valley School's priorities are literacy and numeracy. Alongside this, over the last few years, the school has also been developing a set of initiatives designed to enhance student wellbeing. These include: the promotion of schoolwide behavioural expectations; the employment of a part-time school counsellor to work with students on home or school concerns; a series of parent coffee mornings with guest speakers to discuss topical concerns such as healthy eating or bullying; and participation in project WAVE, a district health board initiative which supports schools to access professionals working in the areas of physical or mental health and wellbeing.

History and value of school involvement with Life Education

At Valley School, Life Education was funded by a local trust and was part of the package of initiatives which supported student wellbeing. The Life Education mobile classroom had been visiting the school for more than 15 years, and the local educator had a longstanding relationship with the school (and many other local schools). Staff viewed the educator as “part of our school community”.

All staff viewed Life Education as a valuable aspect of their health programme, as it reinforced key messages that were a focus at school. Staff considered the Life Education modules to be clearly related to their long-term health curriculum plan and student needs. One example was a Life Education video about starting a new school. Staff considered this to be particularly relevant for their highly mobile student population. Staff also reported that students found Life Education highly motivating:

They deliver a programme that is punchy and topical... We wouldn't use it if it wasn't enjoyed by the children... They must be doing something right to keep that interest up!

Teachers particularly appreciated the specialised knowledge of the educator and the way Life Education gave them a starting point to initiate activities about “scary topics” such as the effects

of tobacco and drugs. They did not always feel confident initiating discussions about these topics, and valued the support that an outside agency, such as the Life Education Trust, could give them.

The fit between Life Education and school practice

The fit between Life Education and schoolwide practices

School leaders considered the messages Life Education promoted were well aligned with their schoolwide focus on positive behaviour. As part of this focus, staff were encouraged to model and reinforce the strategies students could use to: express their feelings; manage their interactions with each other; address bullying; and make good choices. School staff noted that school leaders, teachers, and the educator all promoted the same set of strategies such as the WITS framework.

The fit between Life Education and the curriculum

At Valley School, the curriculum plan included a two-yearly rotation of health topics, with about one topic a term. The Life Education visit was planned at the start of each year and was timed to coincide with a health topic. Life Education visits tended to be organised so that students would do a food and nutrition topic in one year, and a self-esteem or social relationships topic in the next year.

For the Years 5/6 students targeted in this case study, the 2007 health topic was: “Making decisions”. This topic focused on: developing the knowledge, understanding, and skills to handle bullies; building personal identity and self-worth; and coping with peer pressure, friendships, smoking, and alcohol. Each year the educator contacted the school to discuss the programme. The Life Education module that was selected to fit with the senior students’ health topic was: *It’s great to be me*.

As well as having a long-term plan with set topics, the school also organised activities in response to occurrences in the local community. One recent example was a focus on keeping yourself safe, which was developed due to a number of incidents in the town.

Integration of Life Education with classroom practice

The two Years 5/6 teachers we talked to described how they had two main ways of approaching health which were both connected to Life Education. The first was an ongoing focus on developing students’ skills in managing social relationships and decision making. To encourage students to self-manage classroom and playground incidents, teachers promoted the common set of schoolwide strategies. Teachers also supported students to learn self-management strategies through facilitating role plays or whole-class discussions. In one class, students posted concerns in a suggestion box. The class then developed three strategies to address each concern. During these discussions, the teacher advocated the use of the same strategies as Life Education, such as the use of “I” statements and “put ups, not put downs”.

Health topics were also part of the curriculum. In 2007, both teachers used Life Education as a “starter” activity for an in-depth focus on the related health topic. After the Life Education visit, both teachers used an activity from the Life Education *Teacher’s Resource Folder*. In this activity, students developed a “quilt” of the people in their classroom, and what made them similar or unique to each other. To collect information to develop their “patch”, each student interviewed five classmates. Teachers also used the Life Education student booklets to spark whole-class discussions, as work in silent reading time, or as homework. One teacher read a book about friendships, provided by the educator, to her class. The class then analysed this text for a character writing exercise. In general, teachers were very appreciative of different resources the educator provided.

Teachers described how Life Education sessions usually sparked students’ interest in a range of areas which they then followed up. After the 2007 visit, one teacher had discussions with students about: smoking; strategies to use if you found yourself being a passive smoker; and behaviour at parties. In this class, students were interested in the chemicals in cigarettes, so the teacher supported them to use their maths skills to calculate the amount of chemicals a person would ingest if they smoked a packet a day. The other teacher used an activity students started during Life Education to have an in-depth discussion about the consequences of decisions. This activity was a discussion about the question: “If you could change one thing in the world what would it be?”

The impact of Life Education on student and staff learning

Teachers’ views on the impact of Life Education on students’ learning

When asked about the impact of Life Education on students’ learning, teachers were clear that students remembered Life Education messages and content. Although teachers sometimes considered these messages to be repetitive, they noted that students did not, as the content and way it was delivered built in complexity as students got older.

Teachers noted that Life Education focused on aspects of health they considered important, but did not seem to have prominence in the curriculum. One area was the impact of different substances on the body. Through attending Life Education, teachers considered students gained information that would support them to make good decisions, such as knowledge about how the body works and the effects of smoking and other substances. They considered this to be “invaluable background”.

Teachers also valued Life Education’s focus on uniqueness and self-esteem and the way they celebrated students’ differences. They reported that students responded well to the message that they were unique, and that this supported students to build self-esteem:

...it makes children feel they are not alone...they are unique, but others also go through the same changes.

Teachers also considered the quality of the Life Education delivery assisted students' learning. They commented on the educator's: positive and inclusive manner; excellent behaviour management skills; high-quality resources; use of activities that catered for a range of learning styles; and use of different student-centred teaching strategies such as peer sharing. Teachers valued the way messages were presented in ways that connected with students, tapped into their interests, or sparked new ones. From the recent visit, one teacher gave an example:

[The educator] gave the chemicals [in cigarettes] names the kids could relate to, like paint stripper... The children were blown away by the amount of chemicals in a cigarette.

Overall, teachers considered the factors described above, combined with the special environment of the Life Education mobile classroom, resulted in a very positive learning experience for students, during which they retained information:

It's a real experience and journey—that's the magic of it—it's the magic that makes it stick with the children so much more.

Teachers suggested that students' interest in the topics covered by Life Education, and their desire to do follow-up activities, showed they had taken on board key messages. For example, after the recent Life Education visit some students had gone home and talked about smoking with their parents. As a result one parent had visited the teacher to tell her this had prompted her to give up smoking.

When asked if students took on board the strategies advocated by Life Education, teachers noted that Life Education reinforced the idea that students "can do something to rectify a situation". They considered that, given the synergy between the strategies advocated by their school and Life Education, it was difficult to pinpoint the exact contribution of Life Education. But, overall, the fact that the same set of strategies was reinforced during Life Education, as well as in assemblies, the playground, and the classroom, all supported students to take them on board.

Teachers' views on the impact of Life Education on their practice

As well as having an impact on students' self-esteem, content knowledge, and development of strategies, all the teachers considered Life Education had a positive impact on their practice. Some noted that Life Education contributed to their health content knowledge by providing up to date information about areas they were unfamiliar with, such as drugs, as well as those they were more familiar with, such as body systems:

It's good to see the strategies and information you are trying to deliver, being delivered by someone else!

Being part of a Life Education session also provided an opportunity for teachers to pick up new techniques. They commented that Life Education practice was more interactive and involved more peer sharing than their usual classroom practice. Thus they gained ideas about new and fun student-centred teaching strategies and activities they could use. Examples given included different questioning techniques, jigsaw activities, and activities that stretched the imagination.

Teachers also noted Life Education sessions contributed to their knowledge about ways to positively promote messages and positive behaviour management strategies. Teachers also found it useful to observe their students' behaviour, verbal skills, and levels of content knowledge.

Possible improvements to Life Education practice

Teachers appreciated the way Life Education was linked to the curriculum and made efforts to continually update their resources. They found it hard to suggest ways Life Education practice could be improved, mostly because they were unsure of possible alternatives. One suggested Life Education needed a teacher pack with each module to “cut out the searching time for teachers”. This could contain a teacher booklet, other resources such as videos with similar themes to those shown during Life Education, or suggestions about how to access videos. A few changes to existing modules or ideas for new modules were also suggested. A junior teacher considered some topics in the food and nutrition strand included too much revision and not enough new material. A teacher of Years 5/6 students suggested that the modules targeted at Years 7/8 students, such as *Quest*, contained topics that were relevant to her class. One topic was soft illegal drugs such as marijuana. She noted that some families were using drugs, and to support teachers to talk about the effects of drugs, it would be helpful if Life Education had a module for younger students. This teacher also considered that, given its relevance for so many students, a module could be developed about grief in relation to separation and blended families. This could include activities such as how to be a friend to someone whose father had left home. Physical safety (that is, around cars, bikes, in water, at school, or at home) was another potential new module.

Students' perspectives

Students' perspectives on prior Life Education visits

During our visit to Valley School we talked to a total of nine students from two Years 5/6 classes. Both student groups had a clear recollection of prior Life Education visits, and could describe the activities they did, what they had learnt, and the changes they had made as a result. Overall, students noted that Life Education was about making healthy choices and “keeping yourself healthy”. One group commented that the educator was very knowledgeable:

...it's like they know everything!... This is a compliment to the Life Education centre...Harold's a great giraffe!

In regard to the 2006 Life Education visit, during which they did a food and nutrition module, both groups described some of the activities they had done to learn about healthy food. For example, one group described a game they had played to categorise food into the food pyramid groups, and how they had watched a video about Harold going to a birthday party where “they were all eating rubbishy food”. Both groups talked about what they had learnt about healthy food, for example, what was “good” and “bad” food and about 5+A Day. Some described how they had been shocked to learn about the fat, sugar, or salt content of some foods like KFC, McDonalds, or fizzy drinks. As a result, some reported making changes to their behaviour:

I've changed the way I eat. I used to come home and eat a muesli bar...now I eat carrots.... I don't drink coke.

Both groups also described some of the other information Life Education covered, such as how your body digests food and what the brain likes to keep it healthy. In the past they had also learnt about smoking and substances, and how cigarettes have tar in them. Students retained a number of messages from these sessions including:

You've got to learn about self-control 'cause your friends might offer you something like a cigarette.

In relation to past Life Education modules about self-esteem and social relationships, students described how they had watched videos about how to deal with problems with friends. They found this very helpful as it showed both sides of the situation. Students retained a number of messages from these sessions, such as: they were special; they needed to make their own choices; it is good not to keep your emotions "all bottled up"; and it is a good idea to choose trustworthy people as friends.

Students' perspectives on learning prior to the 2007 Life Education visit

Prior to the 2007 Life Education visit, when asked about the school's approach to areas such as relating well to each other, and identity and self-esteem, students initially found it difficult to describe activities and learning connected to these areas. Nevertheless, they were still able to describe the different ways their school focused on some of these areas. Students talked about how they were encouraged to relate positively to each other. They described how teachers set up activities, such as whole-class discussions or role plays, which aimed to support them how to work well in groups or how to be a good buddy.

One group talked about their weekly class meetings, which were run by students. They wrote problems or concerns on a piece of paper and put these in a box. Common problems such as bullying, were then discussed. Students noted that the purpose of these meetings was to support them to develop strategies to deal with situations.

Both groups talked about the consistent messages given by all school staff about behaviour and dealing with playground incidents. They described how the school used the WITS framework to provide a set of schoolwide strategies for dealing with bullying: walk away or ignore them; use "I" statements, such as, "I don't like that..."; and, if you can't sort out the situation, get the duty teacher.

As older students, they were given the responsibility to sort out any problems they, or younger students, had in the playground: "The older kids fix problems for the little kids." They also regularly acted as buddies for younger students. Students enjoyed these opportunities, and saw this as a way they were able to develop their skills in relating to others. Students considered that topics such as identity or self-esteem had not been a recent focus in formal classroom learning.

Most students noted that the activities described above had assisted them to learn about relating well to other students and adults. As a result, most had tried to make changes to their behaviour. Some reported they were doing less bullying; others had become more tolerant of students they did not like, or made more effort to involve new people in games. One common change was increasing their use of “I” statements. Both groups noted they had mixed success with this:

...sometimes ‘I’ statements don’t work...it’s easier to walk away as it gives the signal you’ve had enough.

Some found “I” statements seemed to be more effective with their peers than with their siblings: “It’s hard when you are the youngest in the family.” But overall, students considered using “I” statements had encouraged them to be more empathetic and understand that “it’s really easy to hurt people’s feelings”.

When asked if they got information about social relationships from other places, both groups noted they did not talk much about this area at home. One group described how their parents gave them generic advice such as: “Stand up to your enemies” or “You shouldn’t change who you are just to be cool.” The other group talked about how their families had rules about behaviour. Neither group talked about different strategies promoted by their parents. Most students also noted their families gave them messages about the importance of self-esteem and believing in yourself. For example, some described how family members frequently encouraged them to try new experiences.

Students’ perspectives on the 2007 Life Education visit

In regard to the 2007 Life Education visit, again students had a clear recollection of the various activities they undertook and the messages that were being promoted. Activities included: a jigsaw activity about individuality and what makes you special; a “visit” to the planet Conformitron where everyone was the same; a quiz on body parts; an overview of the digestive system; and discussions about decision making and the impact of smoking on your body.

As a result of these activities, students noted they had learnt facts about the digestive system and organs such as the oesophagus and intestines. Students also recalled a number of facts they had learnt about smoking. These included: how smoking is bad for you; what passive smoking was and its effects; how cigarettes contain many different chemicals that were similar to common substances (such as tar, paint stripper, rocket fuel, or toilet cleaner); and the amount of money that could be wasted on cigarettes. Students reported that they already knew some of this, but they had also gained new knowledge. For example, they already knew it was bad to smoke, but now knew a lot more about exactly why this was the case. Students also enjoyed the focus on making decisions, and were intrigued by the idea that they had already made about 400 choices that day.

When asked if they had learnt any new strategies for managing their relationships, one group observed that, during Life Education, they had discussed similar strategies to those discussed in their class meetings: “We use put ups, not put downs.” They also described how they had learnt strategies to deal with peer pressure around smoking:

I learnt it's ok to say no...like if someone dares you to have a smoke...[You can say things like] 'It's my choice...if you want to do it you can, but I don't want to.'

The other group discussed the Life Education focus on individuality. Students talked about how they had learnt about being different from each other, that it was important to respect your friends and others' individuality, and not laugh at younger students if they could not do something:

I learnt that it is ok to like different things from your friends...it doesn't mean you can't be friends.

Overall, students were very enthusiastic about how the Life Education sessions. They considered Life Education had assisted them to develop more understanding about themselves and others, and had supported their learning of content knowledge and strategies. They were engaged by the teaching strategies and resources used by the educator, and the way messages were presented.

Synergies between Life Education and the classroom

Like their teachers, students talked about how the Life Education strategies and messages had been reinforced in the classroom. Both groups talked about how they had enjoyed interviewing each other about their similarities and differences for the quilt they had made. Students also mentioned that their class had followed up on some of the discussions started during the Life Education visit, and they had worked through the Life Education student booklets in class.

Students noted that some Life Education messages, content, and approaches were similar to school, and some were different. Students considered Life Education and school had consistent messages and strategies about behaviour such as using "put ups, not put downs" and "I" statements. In contrast, they noted that some of the information they gained during Life Education, particularly about smoking, was not covered at school.

Students also considered some of the teaching approaches Life Education used were different from the sorts of tasks they did at school. Students noted they sometimes got bored in class, and would like classroom activities to be more like Life Education. They also would like to do more follow up:

We would like to do more 'after' things... I think they should make us some more activities...it's the best programme we do in school... I would like to learn more about smoking 'cause I found that [the information about chemicals] quite interesting.

Transferring what was learnt during Life Education

As a result of the new knowledge students had acquired during the recent Life Education visit, most had strengthened their resolve: not to smoke; to engage in healthier behaviours; and not to buy into other people's ideas about what is "cool". One commented: "I don't go to the skate park as much 'cause there's lots of people who smoke there." Others were trying to replace unhealthy activities such as watching TV, playing computer games, or eating junk food with healthier activities. Most had also gone home and talked to their parents about smoking or passive smoking. One noted: "My mum gave up smoking—it's her 17th day!" For those whose parents smoked,

talking about smoking could cause difficulties, but students seemed to have an understanding of the complexities surrounding smoking behaviour:

I said to mum, 'Would you mind not smoking in the car around me?' [So she hangs out the window]...but she gets really angry, as it makes her feel bad.

Students also reported that Life Education had given them a wider range of strategies and ideas about how to manage conflicts, which they had started to use during class meetings.

Summary

At Valley School, the staff and students placed a high value on the contribution Life Education made to their school programme. School staff considered the Life Education modules fitted well with the needs of students and saw the educator as a highly skilled member of their team. Over time, school and Life Education practice had blended together, with both groups reinforcing the same messages and strategies. Interviews with students showed they were aware of this synergy. Students had clear recollections of the learning that occurred during Life Education visits and how it connected to learning at school. In regard to the recent visit, the interviews with students suggested that Life Education had enhanced: their knowledge about healthy lifestyles, and in particular, the impact of smoking; their understanding of each other; and their knowledge and use of strategies for managing social relationships and peer pressure.

In the future, staff were planning to maintain the strong connection between Life Education and classroom health topics, and with their whole-school approach to behaviour and student decision making. In 2008, staff were planning to develop a schoolwide approach to inquiry learning, and incorporate Life Education within this.

Appendix C: A fit between health topics and Life Education at Plains School

Introducing Plains School

Plains School is a decile 7 full primary school situated in a rural area near a city. The roll includes approximately 130 students, most of whom identify as NZ European. About one-tenth identify as Māori, and a smaller proportion as Pacific. The school is a focal point in the local community, and has a stable student and staff population. The school also has a strong physical activity focus, with students taking part in a range of activities such as interschool sports competitions and Jump Rope for Heart. In 2007, Plains School had three PD priorities: literacy in the junior school; numeracy; and the use of inquiry models which incorporate higher order thinking and ICT.

History and value of school involvement with Life Education

The Life Education mobile classroom had been visiting Plains School for as long as the Trust had been operating in the local region (that is, more than 10 years). School leaders considered Life Education added substantial value to the school health curriculum and described Life Education as “one of the most exciting health activities” at the school. Staff valued Life Education’s specialised approach to the health curriculum; the way the modules were tailored to specific age groups; and the use of up to date and engaging resources. Staff also had high regard for the local educator’s content knowledge, inclusive and varied teaching style, communication skills, and skills in building on students’ prior learning. Staff also appreciated the way Life Education functioned as a learning experience outside the classroom:

Because we are a rural school, visitors are important... [Increasingly] bussing kids into a central place is becoming out of the question.

The fit between Life Education and school practice

The fit between Life Education and schoolwide practices

School leaders considered Life Education to be well-aligned with a number of whole-school health focuses. One was an emphasis on students learning to moderate their behaviour and make healthy choices in regard to: healthy eating; safety around roads, water, and in the sun; and sexuality, alcohol, and drugs. To ensure students had opportunities to learn about these areas, the school took part in a number of health initiatives. One was a session about puberty. This was held every second year and attended by parents and Years 7/8 students. In the years this session was held, Life Education modules were selected to fit with this focus. Other health initiatives included

a focus on sunsmart behaviours and participation in local beach safety days, and a competition for students to design local road signs for the Traffic Safety Authority. The school's health initiatives were supported by local professionals and agencies such as: public health nurses and doctors; the Family Planning Association; DARE educators; the Heart Foundation; and a surf life saving club.

School leaders also considered that Life Education contributed to a schoolwide focus on developing a culture of caring. Consistent expectations about caring for others were reinforced from the junior school, and the school had a focus on students developing empathy through activities such as buddy and house systems, and fundraising for charities.

The fit between Life Education and the curriculum

At Plains School most health topics were set by individual teachers. Teachers also covered topics as they arose (for example, topical media issues) and at relevant times of the year (for example, positive ways of interacting were covered at the start of each year, and sun and water safety in summer). In addition, the school also had one schoolwide "big idea" a term, such as "Boredom busters". Most of these topics were associated with one main curriculum area.

When planning Life Education visits, in discussion with the educator, individual teachers selected Life Education modules to complement their health programme. To ensure they did not repeat content, teachers reviewed the Life Education modules previously covered by their students. Once a module had been decided, teachers used the *Teacher's Resource Folder* and school resources to develop a set of activities that would occur before, during, and after the Life Education visit. Some teachers also used resources from the USA "Skills for growing" and "Skills for adolescence" programme that had been adapted for New Zealand.¹ This resource offered lesson plans about areas such as decision making and drug education. Staff noted this resource aligned well with Life Education.

The teachers and students from a Years 6/7 and 7/8 class were a focus for this case study. For the Years 6/7 students, the health topic related to the Life Education visit was the impact of different activities on the body system, and the associated Life Education module was *The brainy bunch*. The Years 7/8 topic was about body systems and making decisions, and the associated module was *Making choices*. We also talked to the lead health teacher, who taught a junior class. In 2006 and 2007 she focused on healthy eating. In 2007 her topic was connected with the module: *Food for energy*.

Integration of Life Education into classroom practice

The teachers at Plains School valued Life Education in that it helped them to "keep health on the agenda", and provided an opportunity to reinforce key knowledge and messages about health. To gain maximum benefit from Life Education, teachers considered it important that students had

¹ <http://www.lions-quest.org.nz/programmes.html>

some prior knowledge of the topics focused on during Life Education. To this end, each teacher designed a range of activities for students to start prior to the Life Education visit.

Prior to the 2007 Life Education visit, the lead health teacher introduced students to the food pyramid. After the Life Education visit, the class continued activities about healthy eating and the impact of different sorts of food on the body. Different healthy foods were used as a focus for poetry writing, and the teacher discussed healthy options with students at break and lunch time. The teacher made use of the rhymes and chants the educator used to encourage students to remember key concepts. The class also worked through activities in the Life Education student booklet. To consolidate this unit, students used the knowledge they gained in class and during Life Education to develop a menu and prepare food for a healthy class party.

Prior to the Life Education visit, the Years 6/7 teacher developed a range of individual and discussion activities designed to assist students to explore the structure and functions of the body system. During and after the Life Education visit, the class continued these activities and worked through the Life Education student booklet. At the end of this topic, students' knowledge about body systems was tested.

Prior to the Life Education visit, the Years 7/8 class started research projects on different aspects of the body system. They also started to discuss decision making, actions, and consequences. During and after the Life Education visit, the class completed their projects and worked through some of the activities in the student booklet. They also discussed aspects of the Life Education content that had sparked students' interest such as how to recognise and deal with peer pressure.

As well as a focus on health topics, each teacher had an ongoing approach to supporting students' self-esteem and skills in managing relationships that they considered aligned with the messages promoted by Life Education. For example, at the start of each year one teacher focused on encouraging students to listen to each other, make positive contributions, and give constructive feedback. Another teacher had a focus on modelling positive interactions and supporting students to develop strategies, such as use of "I" statements, to manage their interactions.

The impact of Life Education on student and staff learning

Teachers' views on the impact of Life Education on students' learning

Teachers reported that students were very engaged by the teaching style of the educator, and the activities, resources, and student booklets. As evidence of learning relating to past or current Life Education visits, each teacher outlined some of the information or messages students had retained. The lead health teacher found the sessions had been an effective way of reinforcing key concepts about healthy eating. This teacher attributed recent positive changes to students' lunch box choices to the combined classroom and Life Education focus on healthy food. She noted that students frequently referred to Harold and his views on healthy food when they were learning about the food pyramid, or as they planned what food to eat at their class celebration:

Often Harold would come into the discussion... The kids would say things like ‘Harold would like that [because it’s healthy]....’

The Years 6/7 and 7/8 teachers described some of the content knowledge students had retained from Life Education sessions such as information about how the body system works and the impact of different activities and substances on the body. They noted that students displayed a high level of recall in end-of-topic assessments.

During the recent Life Education visit, the Years 7/8 students attended four Life Education sessions. Along with information on the body system, these sessions covered making informed decisions, as well as strategies for resisting peer pressure and dealing with emotions. As a result of this focus the teacher commented on students’: heightened awareness about the need to make informed decisions and take responsibility for looking after their body; increased ability to recognise peer pressure; and increased awareness of possible inaccuracies and bias in information they received from their peers and from the media.

Overall, teachers held different views about what students learnt during Life Education. Some saw Life Education mostly as a vehicle for “disseminating information” and facts about the body and healthy lifestyles. Others, whilst commenting on the content knowledge that students acquired, also considered Life Education supported students to build self-esteem and learn strategies for managing their emotions, social interactions, or peer pressure. These teachers noted it was harder to unpack whether Life Education had any actual impact on students’ use of these strategies. For some, this was because promotion of these strategies, such as the use of “I” statements, was also an embedded part of their practice. For others, this was due to these strategies being a minor classroom focus.

Teachers’ views on the impact of Life Education on their practice

As well as having an impact on students’ learning, all the teachers interviewed considered Life Education impacted positively on their knowledge or practice. Teachers took different things from Life Education. Most noted Life Education contributed to their knowledge about how to: present information in an engaging way; support students to understand and retain health-related information; and cater for a range of learning styles. Some also saw Life Education as an opportunity to review their coverage of different aspects of the health curriculum, or to gain up to date information for later discussions with students. One noted that Life Education gave them new ideas about how to manage interactions:

...it’s inspiring...I love watching someone else do it so well. They handle tricky situations in a very positive way!

All the teachers also used Life Education sessions, and completion of tasks in the student workbooks, as a way of gauging students’ level of understanding of the concepts recently covered in their topic.

Some staff commented on aspects of Life Education practice they considered could be further developed at their school. They noted that teachers' approaches varied from student-centred to authoritarian. Paralleling this, teachers had different approaches to student behaviour and conflict management. These staff considered students would benefit from all staff adopting approaches that encouraged students to take ownership over their learning and behaviour. Senior staff also noted that they were trying to align schoolwide approaches to healthy eating with the sorts of messages promoted by Life Education. For example, the school was phasing out the sale of unhealthy food at school events or for fundraising.

Possible improvements to Life Education practice

In general, staff found it hard to suggest ways Life Education practice could be improved. One suggested that the educator could incorporate more local knowledge and events into the sessions. Examples included referring to: recent local drug or "P" raids; and the importance of driving safely and not binge drinking, given the school was located on a main road. Another noted that Life Education resources could be enhanced by each module and related student booklet having an associated teacher resource book which summarised the key content covered in that module.

Students' perspectives

Students' perspectives on prior Life Education visits

During our visit to the school we talked to nine Year 6–8 students in two groups. Their position as seniors enabled these students to reflect on the Life Education sessions they had attended over their time at Plains School. Both groups had a clear recollection and enjoyment of past Life Education sessions. Some of the past activities students recalled included:

- doing "simple activities about eating healthy food" and the food pyramid
- taking a "train" ride through the body system and looking at a model's body organs
- doing activities and watching videos about the impact of smoking and other substances
- watching videos about friendships and discussing these with buddies
- learning about peer pressure, goal setting, and messages such as "It's cool to be different."

Students observed that, in each Life Education session, some of the information was a repeat and some was new: "Some things you hear over again, but I learn quite a bit each year." They noted that, as they got older, the focus of Life Education had changed from body systems and healthy eating to drugs, making decisions, and living moderately. Students also commented that over time the information and activities got more complex, and considered Life Education to be appropriately pitched for different age groups. Students were also very positive about the Life Education student booklet and noted that in previous years they had worked through them as a class and kept them in their portfolios:

I've got about five of them in my old portfolios!... I still look at them sometimes... My dad doesn't know anything about the body so we teach him...[using the booklets].

The learning they recalled from past visits centred around facts about the body system and healthy choices, and some of the messages about self-esteem and getting on with friends.

Students' perspectives on learning prior to the 2007 Life Education visit

Prior to the 2007 Life Education visit, when asked about the current classroom topics connected to the upcoming visit, both groups described how they had just started this work. The Years 6/7 group was learning about different parts of the body, such as muscles, joints, the brain, lungs, and the nervous and digestive system. They were doing activities such as “drawing a diagram of how the food gets processed”, and had learnt facts such as “which is the strongest muscle, smallest or largest bone...”. From this work students noted they had learnt some things that made them think differently about their body and how they could damage it if they were not careful: “I learnt the body is more fragile than I thought.” All were enjoying this focus and were keen to learn more about areas such as the brain, how the nervous system sends messages, and reflexes.

The Years 7/8 group noted that they had just started some group research on body systems which they would then be presenting to the class. These students were using resources such as Wikipedia and other Internet sites, and encyclopaedias and library books, to find out information about the heart, lungs, and digestion. Students noted that they were learning facts such as how arteries can get clogged up and the impact of eating saturated fats. This group had also started a focus on decision making. They had been introduced to the Thinking Hats and how they could look at situations in different ways. They had also been doing activities about actions and consequences, and had been introduced to a resource about the steps to successful decision making.

These students also got information about healthy living and making choices from home. The Years 6/7 group noted their parents talked about ways to look after your body such as healthy eating, and avoiding smoking and injuries. The Years 7/8 students described how their parents talked to them “all the time” about the sorts of decisions they would face as young people in regards to smoking, drugs, sexuality, and alcohol.

Students' perspectives on the 2007 Life Education visit

In regard to the 2007 Life Education visit, again students had a clear recollection of the various activities they undertook and the messages that were being promoted. Overall, students were enthusiastic about the sessions. Students in the Years 6/7 group described how they had: played games that involved naming body parts; watched a video about what happens to different parts of the body as you wake up and eat breakfast; found out what impact substances such as apples and alcohol have on the body; discussed with buddies and as a group how to help a drunk person and what to do if you felt depressed or stressed; discussed the three ways you could react to peer pressure or pressure to smoke (passive, assertive, aggressive); and played various games.

The Years 6/7 group considered that these activities had helped them learn new information about how the body works and the rationale underpinning common health messages. For example, they noted they got lot of messages about how they should eat more fruit, but by showing them what

happened to the body as fruit was digested, Life Education had shown them exactly *why* this was a good idea. Students also commented that the Life Education session had supported them to learn more about: lessening the effects of alcohol; dealing with peer pressure; feeling good about yourself; understanding others; and dealing with emotions such as depression. They considered these topics were very relevant for their age group as they would soon be at high school: “We are getting older and we have to learn to deal with this [peer pressure].”

Students in the Years 7/8 group described how they had: looked at a model of a body system and explored the impact of different foods on the body; learnt what the brain looks like; discussed biased information and how you need information to make good decisions; completed activities about smoking facts and the common ingredients in cigarettes; watched and discussed a video about peer pressure; discussed decision making; and talked about how people behaved when they were having an emotional reaction or “WHAM” attack and how to deal with this: “When you are getting stressed go away and cool down!” Students noted that some of this information they had already covered or was a repeat from past Life Education sessions. Other information was new, such as some of the facts about the body and ingredients in cigarettes. Students retained a number of messages from these sessions such as “Delay your decisions till you have information” and “Don’t get pushed into things by your friends.” Some commented that they considered the content of last year’s module, *From the shadows*, to be more relevant to their interests.

Synergies between Life Education and the classroom

Students described how, during and after the Life Education sessions, they had continued with related class work. Both groups had completed their work on the body system, and had worked through parts of the Life Education student booklet in class. Most of the class work students recalled concerned the facts they had learnt about the body. Both groups also noted that, in class, they had discussed or did related activities about “a little bit of everything” that was covered in the Life Education sessions.

When asked whether their teachers encouraged them to use the strategies promoted during Life Education, for managing peer pressure and social relationships, students replied, “It depends on the teacher.” They noted that some teachers talked about good decision making or encouraged them to develop ways to resolve disputes, whilst others did not.

Students had a range of views on the similarities and differences between the classroom and Life Education. They noted that the work they did in class was more in-depth, and teachers used a smaller range of teaching strategies than the educator: “[In class] we normally just write...we have to be quiet.” Students considered the way the educator approached learning was different and more fun, and could clearly describe the teaching strategies used by the educator which they found engaging. In particular, they liked the way the educator had “a positive way of talking”, explained things well, and let them answer questions. They also valued the fact that Life Education was: fast-paced; involved interactive tasks; had good-quality visual resources, body models, and DVDs; and incorporated more buddy work than their usual classroom interactions:

“We were usually with buddies—buddies were a good thing.” Students also enjoyed the environment of the mobile classroom, and Harold’s sense of humour:

Harold’s always a good laugh... The guy that does it [Harold] is really good at explaining things. He does it in a funny way.

As well as identifying similarities and differences in the *ways* they learnt, students also identified similarities and differences between school and Life Education focuses. Students noted that teachers tended to give them messages about working hard, doing well, and not “getting into trouble”. Students noted that the school motto, “Look forward to success”, summarised one key message. In contrast, Life Education focused more on feeling good about yourself and peer pressure. Students reported that both school and Life Education gave similar messages about keeping fit, healthy eating, and thinking about the consequences of their behaviour.

Overall, students noted they found Life Education very valuable and some wanted more opportunity to follow up on topics they considered relevant to their age group. Students’ views on what was relevant differed. Most liked the focus on peer pressure and dealing with stress. Others wanted to learn more facts about puberty and how alcohol, drugs, and “bad foods” impacted on the body.

Transferring what was learnt during Life Education

Students in both groups were able to describe specific behaviour changes they had made as a result of prior or current Life Education sessions. They noted that, over the years, Life Education had contributed to them having healthier lifestyles (by providing information about healthy eating and physical activity). For example, in regard to the recent Life Education sessions, one noted:

I’m eating more vegetables and fruit. ‘Cause you find out *why* you have to do it, you’re not just told to do it!

Most also noted they had strengthened their resolve not to succumb to peer pressure about smoking, drugs, or binge drinking. Students also described how Life Education had supported them to build their confidence, make good choices, and improve their relationships with their friends. These changes were also influenced by other factors, such as becoming more mature, but both groups agreed that Life Education was a contributing factor:

I think I’ve learnt a lot from Life Education...it gives you a head start about life.

When asked for examples of changes, one group described how they had been ignoring a boy at school. After discussing a Life Education video about being inclusive, they started to include him, and all ended up being good friends. Another example given was a student who had fallen out with her best friend. She had used the strategies suggested in Life Education to patch up their fight.

Summary

At Plains School, all the school staff and students we talked to were enthusiastic about past and recent Life Education visits. School staff were particularly impressed by the high quality of the educator's teaching practice and resources. Teachers noted that their system of connecting the Life Education modules with prior classroom learning around a health topic supported students to retain key messages about health.

Due to their seniority in the school, the students we talked to were able to comment on the cumulative impact of Life Education visits. Like their teachers, students attributed the fact that they retained Life Education content and messages to the quality of the educator's practice and resources, and the perceived relevance of these messages. Over time, Life Education visits had clearly assisted students to learn content knowledge, and had also positively impacted on students' self-confidence and development of strategies for maintaining healthy lifestyles and relationships. It is likely that these outcomes would be further enhanced through the development of a schoolwide approach to positive behaviour that enables students to develop and own strategies.

Appendix D: Integrating Life Education into the health plan at Village School

Introducing Village School

Village School is a decile 10 full primary school situated in a growing village close to the sea and a large urban area. The school has a tight enrolment zone, and the roll includes approximately 400 students, with some highly mobile parents, resulting in some roll turnover. About four-fifths of students identify as European/NZ European and a few as Māori or Asian. The school plays a central role in the community, and local parents are supportive of the school and have high expectations of the school, staff, and children.

School leaders described the school's practice as resting in an "intensive inquiry approach to learning, based on student-centred practice". Related to this focus is a recognition of the importance of PD for teachers and the provision of varied learning experiences for students, with input from outside agencies. Accordingly, the school runs a number of health-related initiatives including Life Education, Kia Kaha, DARE, Keeping Ourselves Safe, Red Cross first aid, road safety, and Civil Defence awareness.

History and value of school involvement with Life Education

Many of the staff interviewed have been at Village School for the last six years, and the Life Education mobile classroom had been visiting for at least that long. Staff viewed Life Education as a valuable resource to support their classroom teaching, and commented on the educator's flexibility in fitting in with school and classroom needs as required. School leaders indicated that the educator was a significant part of the value of Life Education, in that they valued expertise and "people, not posters". Staff appreciated the educator's content and pedagogical knowledge, communication skills, and teaching approach, and commented that the educator was effective at "giving kids information at a level that's appropriate for their understanding". All staff interviewed also valued the practical nature of Life Education. They identified that Life Education catered to different learning styles, and that the use of representative models, video, sound, and controlled lighting all helped to "switch the children on".

The fit between Life Education and school practice

The fit between Life Education and schoolwide practices

All staff considered Life Education aligned very well with schoolwide values, and pedagogy, as well as whole-school health focuses. School leaders considered the school's shared values

(respect, being positive, compassion, honesty, and courage) aligned very closely with Life Education philosophies about valuing uniqueness, understanding yourself, and respecting others. Staff also considered that the Life Education teaching approaches and focus on supporting students to make well-informed choices fitted well with school philosophies about learning and prioritisation of student-centred practice. School leaders noted the connection between Life Education and the school's representation of a learning community for students. This model has four pillars, each of which represented an underlying concept: learning *to know*; learning *to do*; learning *to live*; and learning *to be*. This model was developed from the report: *Learning: The Treasure Within* (UNESCO, 1996) which was the result of a large international project about education for the 21st century.

Staff also considered that Life Education helped to reinforce school messages about healthy food. Recently, the school had engaged in community consultation and, as a result, had developed a schoolwide healthy food and “water only” policy for drinks.

The fit between Life Education and the Health and PE curriculum

Village School had a two-year cycle for the health curriculum. As part of this cycle, in an odd year the police ran Keeping Ourselves Safe; and in an even year the school took part in Kia Kaha. The curriculum plan also included an annual Years 7 and 8 unit on sexuality and puberty, which was designed to address developmental concerns appropriate to students' age. When planning this unit, teachers designed a range of activities using school resources, resource kits, and the *Positive Puberty* book from the *Curriculum in Action* series.² Learning experiences included role plays, watching videos, and reading books on related topics. Each year this unit was supported by a Life Education module.

In 2007, the two Years 7 and 8 classes targeted for this case study were doing the puberty unit with a particular focus on physical changes. The Life Education module, *Keeping a balance*, was included in the middle of this unit as an integral resource and learning experience. The educator adapted the module to support the school's focus by looking at the causes of emotional stress, and what is happening in the body to create this stress. Both teachers considered the Life Education focus on puberty-related stress complemented their focus on physical changes, and supported them to address how family, culture, peers, and the media can influence young peoples' experiences.

At other year levels, individual teachers selected Life Education modules to support their health focuses and topics. Staff described how the educator made adjustments to sessions to match them with classroom needs, as well as adjusting her delivery for different year and ability levels. Overall, all the staff interviewed considered that Life Education was effective or very effective in assisting staff to address the Health and PE curriculum.

² http://www.tki.org.nz/r/health/cia/pos_puberty/index_e.php

Integration of Life Education into classroom practice

The teachers we interviewed described how they had two main ways of integrating Life Education into their classroom programme. One way was at the unit level described previously. In addition, the learning that occurred during Life Education was woven into classroom discussions during the unit and the rest of the year. Both classes had a question box where students could write questions or ideas about classroom learning or current events such as Life Education. The points raised were discussed in class. Teachers noted the question box provided students with an important opportunity to revisit prior learning.

The impact of Life Education on student and staff learning

Teachers' views on the impact of Life Education on students' learning

School staff noted that Life Education reached all students—including those with severe special needs. As one teacher stated:

[students] love it so much and can remember so much...which is always a good test of effectiveness...

Because of the integrated nature of the school and Life Education planning and learning experiences, staff recognised the difficulty of attributing changes in students' learning solely to Life Education. Given this, staff considered Life Education "definitely contributed" to this learning and noted that students showed significant recall of information from Life Education visits, as well as recall and use of some behaviour strategies.

In regard to the recent Life Education sessions, both teachers described the impact of these on class journalling or question box time. Students wrote about experimenting with ideas they learnt during Life Education. Some described how they were trying different ways to handle stress. Others described how they were thinking about healthy choices such as delaying decisions about drug taking. Both teachers stated that they had noticed, or heard students talking about, changes they had made to their behaviour as a result of Life Education. Some students also showed more interest in reading about related health topics.

In relation to past Life Education visits, both teachers described a number of changes they had noted; for example, students had developed skills in classifying healthy foods, or were able to recall facts about the effects of drugs. One teacher commented that some students could remember details about Harold from their junior years. The educator's teaching approach was identified as an important contributing factor to student learning.

Teachers' views on the impact of Life Education on their practice

Staff identified the educator's teaching approaches as good practice and expressed the view that their own and colleagues' practice was similar or "hopefully similar". Teachers identified a

number of approaches common to their school and Life Education. These included: starting from where students were at; use of small-group work, Think–Pair–Share, and whole class discussions; offering a range of different learning experiences around a topic; and emphasising the importance of asking questions and that there is no pressure to give the “right answer”.

Staff noted that the educator modelled “great pedagogy” and the variety of approaches she used was a good reminder to teachers about: catering to different learning styles; effective questioning; and facilitating “let’s find out” explorations and nonjudgemental discussions. Some teachers indicated that they could not help but learn from observing Life Education. As one noted, “You always learn from watching other people teach.”

Teachers also stated that, due to the expertise of the educator, Life Education also impacted positively on their own practice as it served as a form of PD for the health curriculum. All staff noted that the Life Education experience supported teachers to improve their health content knowledge. Both classroom teachers commented that, from the recent sessions, they had gained information about body systems and how the body reacts under stress.

Possible improvements to Life Education practice

Staff found it difficult to identify any improvements to Life Education. One suggested it was important to keep the information about drugs current and aligned with the media. Others indicated the importance of updating the videos to ensure the students could relate to the characters. One commented that, because Village School students were involved in quite practical courses, such as Civil Defence and Red Cross, the inclusion of more activity-based learning was important to engage older students.

Students’ perspectives

Students’ perspectives on prior Life Education visits

At Village School we interviewed 11 Years 7/8 students from two classes. All students had experienced previous Life Education visits and had significant recollections of these. Students tended to recollect the features and activities of Life Education, information about body systems, and key messages. Students had fewer memories about the strategies covered in Life Education, although these were mentioned by some students.

Most students could recall a number of features of Life Education such as the stars, Harold, the jokes, a plastic body model, a digital body, and a magic wand. Additionally, they also described the sorts of activities they did such as taking out body parts, matching nicknames of drugs to the type of drug, and acting in role plays about peer pressure. Students also recalled watching a number of videos about being bullied, someone taking drugs and being hospitalised, and interviews with high school students about alcohol. One group considered that the videos about drugs had a lasting effect because the characters were “real” and students felt they could relate to them.

One group in particular could recall a significant amount of information about the importance of healthy eating, identifying food groups, what some foods do to our body, naming body parts and functions, body systems, and types of drugs. They could list off a number of facts they had learnt such as smoking: shortens life expectancy; makes veins smaller; and is bad for the lungs.

Students also recalled some of the key Life Education messages. One group talked about the messages: “I am unique and special in my own way”, and “Everyone is special”. The other group recalled the message “Delay the decision” to take drugs. They noted this message came from the Web of Addiction which was part of their 2006 Life Education module: *From the shadows*.

When asked about the strategies focused on in Life Education, students commented that they had not needed to use the strategies for dealing with bullying at school and that they did not have a problem with peer pressure. However, they considered they would know how to recognise these situations and gave examples of the strategies they could use. Additionally, several students could remember the phrase “Stop it. I don’t like it” from Years 2–3, and other activities they did that assisted them to explore ways to get out of situations.

Overall, students noted they enjoyed past Life Education sessions because of the interesting activities, videos, and technology. They liked the fact that they were outside of the classroom, they were not sitting down and reading, and that they got a booklet. A number of students were keen to find out more about drugs and effects on the body. This group frequently referred to learning experiences that impressed them from the 2006 Life Education *From the shadows* module.

Students’ perspectives on learning related to the 2007 Life Education visit

Prior to the 2007 Life Education visit, when asked about their school learning about health and body systems, students described a number of different learning experiences they had taken part in. These included past Life Education visits as well as experiences during a range of other initiatives such as Kia Kaha, Keeping Ourselves Safe, and DARE. These experiences involved learning a combination of facts about health and health messages, as well as strategies.

In general, students could recall a significant amount of information about a wide range of health topics. This included information about different forms of abuse, details from a video about how to recognise abuse, and information about how different drugs affected the body. Many students had read *The Great Brain Robbery* (Scott & Grice, 2006), and enthusiastically described how they had learnt about drugs and their effects on the brain.

Along with health information, students could also recall a number of health messages, such as, “Alcohol kills the liver”, and “Smoking does bad things to your lungs”. Students were not always sure where these messages came from.

Students also recalled learning, during DARE, about recognising and resisting peer pressure. One of these strategies was to turn peer pressure into a joke to diffuse the tension rather than directly

confront someone or be too passive. Students in one group discussed drugs and peer pressure together, illustrating how the two fit together, and how knowledge and strategies can be applied.

Students from both groups also identified other sources of health information such as parents, other family members, books, and TV programmes. They commented that they got a lot of health information from their parents and TV programmes, such as, *You are what you eat*, a BBC programme that graphically explores a healthy and unhealthy future scenario for an individual. There were also several books relating to puberty in the school library that students were well aware of.

Students' perspectives on the 2007 Life Education visit

When asked about the recent Life Education visit and the *Keeping a balance* module, students described a range of learning activities they had taken part in about body systems, drugs, and stress. These activities included: handling body parts from a model; matching body parts and functions; identifying the main things their body needs; identifying legal and illegal drugs and different names for drugs; a brain scan activity; watching a video about following the crowd; and a memorising activity undertaken during simulated stress. Other students noted there had been lots of group discussion about stress and drugs.

Students' descriptions of what they had learnt from these activities mostly centred around how they had learnt information and facts. Both groups described learning new information about: the reproductive and nervous body systems; different kinds of drugs; how drugs can affect the brain; and how stress can affect the brain. One group could name a range of body systems (including the integumentary³ system), and recalled seven steps of human development. They also talked about brain development (that the brain was fully grown by age three, and fully developed by age 22) and how the brain can develop dependency. The group interview also sparked students to make connections with previous Life Education visits, especially in relation to topics that were covered in both years, such as body systems and drugs. One group considered they had already covered some of the aspects about drugs in the previous *From the shadows* module.

As well as learning information, students also recalled some new strategies they had learnt for dealing with stress. These included: pillow fighting; being a "sleeping lion" and having a rest even if lots of things were going on around you; having a bath; taking a walk; or talking to someone. Several students also identified a number of new strategies they had learnt for dealing with peer pressure and connected these to the ideas contained in a video they watched during a previous Life Education visit. These strategies included: walking away or doing your own thing; saying "It's my life not yours"; or telling someone else who can support you.

A number of students also recalled some of the key Life Education messages about being unique and special, and noted that, from watching a video about peer pressure, Life Education had given them the message that they could avoid peer pressure and "do what I want". Other students stated

³ External covering of the body, comprising the skin, hair, scales, nails, sweat glands, and their products.

they were already aware of the messages that Life Education was promoting such as “Saying NO to drugs”.

One group considered Life Education helped them learn about health and feeling good about themselves. There was less consensus in the other group. Some students considered Life Education had more impact when they were younger, another noted the fun environment and activities “affects the way we learn”, and others were unsure about whether Life Education has assisted their learning.

Synergies between Life Education and the classroom

When asked about the connections between Life Education and learning in class, one group noted that, in class, they had revisited what they learnt during Life Education. These students saw the connection between Life Education and their puberty unit. They commented, “We learn different things, but they’re relevant to each other.” Students from the other group stated their class had a “tight schedule” and there was “not time for revisiting”.

Students noted similarities and differences in the teaching approaches used in Life Education and in the classroom. Similarities included a focus on discussions. In terms of differences, students noted that Life Education used more diagrams, and was more “hands on” and exciting as they were being taught by a different person. Some stated they preferred to learn by doing real tasks. They noted their school provided these opportunities, citing a recent Civil Defence exercise as an example.

Some students commented that Life Education was more explicit than school about the messages it was promoting. For example, in relation to self-esteem, a number of students commented that Life Education had a strong focus on the message that you were unique and special. They noted that this message was also reinforced at school, but less explicitly: “it’s implied... [we] kind of get it all year round”. They noted that Life Education also made more use of slogans or catch phrases, such as “Delay the decision”, whereas school focused more on speeches and discussion.

Transferring what was learnt during Life Education

When asked for examples of behaviour changes related to the learning gained from Life Education, students commented that, as a result of a past school and Life Education focus on healthy food and exercise, they had developed an increased awareness of food to eat and not to eat, especially “high sugary and fatty foods”. A number of students identified that, as a result of this focus, they had made some healthy choices such as avoiding the dairy (and junk food), getting active, or reducing sugar drinks.

In regard to the 2007 Life Education visit, rather than talk about specific behaviour changes, students tended to describe how the knowledge and behaviour strategies they had gained contributed to them feeling more prepared for the future. Students noted that the combined classroom and Life Education focus on puberty had supported them to understand, and be prepared for, pubertal changes:

it's important to know what's going on inside you...so you know there is nothing wrong (when it happens).

Some students from both groups considered that Life Education had improved their health awareness in regard to drugs. They stated that it was important to be informed about how substances impacted on your bodies and to know the right options. As one noted:

Now that you know what it does to you, you still have the choice whether you want to have it or not.

Students in one group noted that Life Education had given them some new ideas about dealing with peer pressure. They considered previously they may have gone along with peer pressure, but now they were beginning to identify strategies they *could* use. One student described how Life Education had supported her to recognise that she had been peer pressured into buying something, and explained this to her mother. Others noted they felt OK about making their own choices, but they now had more awareness that, if their friend got angry about their choices, then they were not really a good friend. Students in the other group found it difficult to identify ways they had used information from the recent Life Education visit. They did not see stress or peer pressure as a concern, and several commented that they “don't really get stressed...not at school”.

Summary

Staff at Village School were enthusiastic about the “wow factor” of Life Education which provided “something different” for students. They considered Life Education fitted very well with schoolwide values, and core beliefs about teaching and learning. In relation to the puberty unit on which this case study focused, teachers saw Life Education as an integral part of their unit plan, and as a valuable resource to utilise in conjunction with classroom learning experiences. Staff noted that the expertise, commitment, and flexibility of the educator was fundamental to the success of Life Education. The way the educator consulted with teachers, and adapted modules, resulted in a close fit between Life Education and the school programme. Teachers noted that this co-ordination enabled the school and Life Education to offer complementary activities centred around recognising and managing stress, making informed choices, and being aware of pubertal changes.

The students we talked to displayed a high level of recall about past and current Life Education visits, the learning activities they took part in, and the health content knowledge that was covered. Their comments show the cumulative effect of Life Education on their health content knowledge. To a lesser extent, students' comments also indicated that Life Education had supported them to learn behaviour strategies they could use in the future.

These students were highly interested in, and well-informed about, a number of topics they perceived to be relevant such as pubertal change and the impact of drugs. Along with Life Education, they drew from a number of sources of health-related information including TV and other media, the Internet, and family members. This highlights the importance of teachers and

educators keeping up to date with health issues so that they can make connections with students' interests.

References

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Appendix E: Aligning Life Education, the curriculum, and whole-school practice at Bay School

Introducing Bay School

Bay School is a decile 10 contributing Catholic school situated in a suburb close to a city. Although high decile, the school has an enrolment from two parishes, and serves students from a diverse range of socioeconomic backgrounds. The roll includes approximately 200 students; two-thirds are boys, and one-third, girls. Most students identify as NZ European, and a small number as Asian or Māori. School leaders noted that the parent community is very interested in the children's education and supportive of the school. Recently, the school has implemented several schoolwide health-related initiatives including Quality Circle Time and brain-based learning.

History and value of school involvement with Life Education

The principal considered that Bay School was privileged to have an annual Life Education visit, and staff identified that Life Education models, animations, videos, and Harold enhanced their health programme. Several teachers reported that students "loved" the Life Education experience, which they considered motivated students to learn. Harold was recognised as a strong drawcard for young children, as was the "power of the technology and the delivery". Staff commented that the skills of the educator, who was described as "very, very positive with the children", were pivotal to the success of Life Education. In particular, staff noted that the educator: met children at their level; catered for different learning styles; used of a range of teaching approaches; and offered up to date content knowledge. Teachers also appreciated the support the educator provided before and after Life Education visits, as well as the additional resources they offered to support classroom programmes.

The fit between Life Education and school practice

The fit between Life Education and schoolwide practices

The principal and lead health teacher at Bay School commented that the Life Education philosophy fitted well with their underlying philosophies about education, in particular, the idea that children are valued, unique, and special. School leaders and teachers also considered that Life Education aligned extremely well with a range of schoolwide health focuses. For example, the Life Education emphasis on student empowerment, and providing students with information so

that they could make informed choices, complemented Bay School's schoolwide approach to health.

The school has recently allocated PD time to several schoolwide initiatives. These included Jenny Mosley's Quality Circle Time (QCT)⁴ which is a whole-school approach to creating a positive culture. QCT involves an ongoing process of circle meetings amongst staff or within a class. Meeting guidelines include "listening systems" and "golden rules". Underlying QCT is the belief that the use of a democratic system to discuss concerns will promote improved relationships, self-esteem, and self-confidence. Staff considered that Life Education teaching approaches fitted well with QCT. They also described how the educator adapted her approach to fit with QCT by referring to the golden rules during sessions.

Brain-based learning was another schoolwide focus that staff considered was connected to Life Education. The school's approach had its origins in Guy Claxton's concept of "building learning power"⁵ through understanding how the brain works and how children learn to be resilient, resourceful, and reflective learners. Across the whole school, time was put aside every day for brain food, water, and physical activity. Teachers noted that this daily replenishment reinforced a range of healthy living messages from past and current Life Education modules.

The fit between Life Education and the curriculum

At Bay School, the principal and lead health teacher noted that Life Education aligned well with both the Religious Education curriculum and the Health and PE curriculum. Bay School's programme includes the module *Myself and others*, from the Catholic Religious Education Curriculum. This module incorporates a focus on self-esteem, how every person is special and unique, and valuing others. Staff noted that this module reinforces similar concepts to Life Education, and is also closely tied to the NZ Health curriculum strands: *Personal health and physical development* and *Relationships with other people*.

The main focus of the health curriculum at Bay School is eight schoolwide "big health ideas" (e.g., Leisure, Humour, Communication, Identity, Energy) that are covered over a two-year cycle (one per term). The planning for these units is done across the whole school. The big idea during our visit was Leisure. Prior to the Life Education visit, the educator met with classroom teachers to select modules that would support their Leisure unit, and discuss how these could be adapted to fit with specific classroom focuses. The Life Education module selected for the two Years 5 and 6 classes in this study was *The brainy bunch*. This module covers the idea of how the brain interacts with other parts of the body, and how stress may affect it, reinforcing the need for leisure and healthy living.

⁴ <http://www.circle-time.co.uk>

⁵ <http://www.guyclaxton.com/blp.htm>

Teachers of the Years 5 and 6 classes in this case study noted that they used *The brainy bunch* as a “springboard” to start their units on Leisure. Life Education was described as a “short, concise burst of delivery”, and after the Life Education visit, teachers revisited key learning and messages. Teachers also designed a number of related learning activities during which children explored their experiences with stress, food, and leisure. These included a brainstorm, use of a home diary to parents, activities from a Newspapers in Education unit about healthy habits, and completion of some of the activities in the Life Education student booklets.

The impact of Life Education on student and staff learning

Teachers’ views on the impact of Life Education on students’ learning

The teachers we interviewed considered that Life Education had a powerful and positive impact on students’ knowledge and understandings about health. The close alignment between Life Education and schoolwide initiatives meant they had difficulty crediting any changes in knowledge, understandings, or behaviour to the Life Education experience alone. As one teacher stated, “It’s the whole way we do things here, anyway.”

Given this, teachers noted that students displayed clear recall of the activities, information, and messages presented during Life Education. Teachers considered this recall was supported by some of the features of Life Education including the: recapping of previous knowledge and understandings; emphasis on student involvement; and tightly focused sessions. Overall, teachers described Life Education as “a huge hook for the children”, which excited them about learning. All three teachers commented that children shared Life Education messages and experiences at home.

Additionally, teachers identified that students’ learning was enhanced by the synergy between Life Education, whole school practices, and classroom focuses. For example, teachers attributed students’ comprehensive recall of information about how the brain can be affected by stress to the alignment between Life Education and the school focus on brain-based learning. Teachers also noted that students’ recall of messages and information about nutrition was assisted by a past connection between Life Education and classroom units on this topic.

Most of the teachers’ descriptions of student learning relating to Life Education centred around students’ increased motivation and recall of information. Teachers also provided a few examples of students taking on board self-esteem messages or making healthy lifestyle choices.

Teachers’ views on the impact of Life Education on their practice

When asked about the impact on their own practice, staff commented that teaching approaches at Bay School were similar to those of the educator, although several added, “without the resources”. Staff recognised that the educator’s way of interacting and engaging with students tied closely to the positive encouragement they also advocated.

Additionally, the teachers considered that the high quality of the educator's teaching practice positively influenced their practice. During Life Education sessions teachers acquired new ideas or were reminded of a range of approaches they could use in the classroom. In particular, teachers gained tips about the different ways they could explain ideas or ask students questions.

Teachers also commented that during Life Education visits they learnt new content knowledge. One valued the chance Life Education offered her to observe her class interacting with somebody else, and ascertain students' level of understanding of concepts: "You can take more in about their responses than if you are asking the questions."

Possible improvements to Life Education practice

Staff found it difficult to suggest ways to improve Life Education. School leaders commented that Life Education has always been responsive to feedback, and that the educators already reflected on their practice. Teachers suggested that each classroom teacher could get a copy of the resource folder to assist them with organisation and planning of units.

Students' perspectives

Students' perspectives on prior Life Education visits

During our visit to Bay School we interviewed 10 Years 5/6 students from two classes. When asked about prior Life Education visits, both groups could recall a number of activities, information, and key messages. Like their teachers, students tended to remember more detail about the facts they had learnt than strategies or key messages.

Some of the main activities students recollected were: a video about a student's first day at school; activities about making friendship choices; and a body carpet where you match body parts by placing velcroed parts on the wall.

In terms of content learning, both groups talked about the activities they had done relating to body systems, and what they had learnt as a result. The content knowledge they recalled included names of body parts, facts about the intestines and brain, and details about the digestive system.

In terms of messages, a number of students recalled pretending to be on a spaceship and arriving at a planet where everyone was the same. Students stated that, "It would be boring if everyone was the same." From this activity, students recalled the message "It's OK to be different" and ideas about accepting others' differences.

Students' perspectives on learning prior to the 2007 Life Education visit

Before the current Life Education visit, students were asked about the learning that had occurred at school in relation to body systems. All students focused on what they had learnt as a result of the schoolwide focus on brain-based learning. They recalled a considerable amount of factual information about the brain and described how they had learnt about the importance of snacks and

exercise. All students stated that they had made changes to their behaviour as a result of this ongoing emphasis at school. One example of this was the reduction in sugar drinks and increased intake of water.

The Year 5 students also recalled information they had gained during units of work on prior big health ideas such as Communication and Energy. They also commented that they had seen a range of health-related videos.

The Year 6 students remembered a number of health messages that came from a range of sources, such as “Fat clogs up (hardens) your arteries”, “Second hand smoke is worse”, and “You are what you eat”. A number of students indicated that they understood the importance of learning about health issues early in order to help them make informed choices in the future. One student commented:

kids pick up habits when they’re young...so learn about your body when you’re younger (because) when you’re older you need to make right choices.

Students could also recall health information and messages gained from a variety of external providers. Students noted that the school had arranged Life Education and several other experts to come in and talk about the brain and healthy foods. Most also identified a range of other sources of health information including their parents, the library, the Internet (e.g., Google), and TV programmes such as *Down size me* and *Turn back your body clock*.

Students’ perspectives on the 2007 Life Education visit

About one month after the Life Education visit we asked students what they did during this visit and what they learnt. Students from both groups could recall a significant number of learning activities, facts about the body and brain, as well as key messages. Some students also described the strategies they had learnt for dealing with peer pressure.

One activity that the Year 5 students recalled was a “video about a kid waking up in the morning” which showed his changing energy levels and the body parts—brain, heart, lungs, muscles, and stomach—and how stress on the body affected these parts. Both groups of students recalled naming body parts, and identifying their function. The Year 6 students recalled how Tam⁶ talked to them about the body and the brain, and how the body parts lit up.

Compared to what they could remember from previous Life Education visits, students found it easier to recall recent information they had learnt about: body parts under pressure; energy drinks; how body systems work; and facts about the intestines, veins, liver, and nerves. The Year 5 students described going around the room identifying what their body needs from a big list of possible needs, such as water, oxygen, alcohol, sleep, caffeine, or drugs. They noted that: water, oxygen, sleep, and food were the healthy things the body needs; drugs (illegal) were “not needed”; and for alcohol and caffeine “not much” was needed. The Year 5 students also described

⁶ The plastic body was called Tam in some schools or Pat in other schools.

learning about alcohol and nicotine and how they affect the brain. Some facts they recalled included: “The liver has a lot of jobs—breaking up food and cleansing the blood (or is that the kidneys?)”; “The small intestine is as thick as your thumb and is about 4, 5, or 6 metres long”; and “There are holes in the big intestine so the liquid squirts in and out.” Students also explained that energy drinks such as V, Lift, Red Bull, E2, and Coke have caffeine and sugar in them, and “make you stay up”.

Both groups of students also talked about learning about peer pressure. The Year 5 students described how they had done role plays about smoking and peer pressure. Some of the Year 6 students recalled exploring different ways of responding to peer pressure. They named three ways of handling this pressure (passive, assertive, and aggressive) and could describe each, and its possible outcomes. Although some stated they “kind of already knew” things from a video about bullying and peer pressure, they noted that the focus on peer pressure had enabled them to reflect on new ways to do things. As one noted:

Don’t hesitate... Just say no and walk away, if you hesitate the person will keep nagging, if you get aggressive it could end up going to the teacher.

Students from both groups could also clearly recall a number of messages from the Life Education visit including: “Stay positive about yourself—even if you’ve done something bad”; “Stay healthy”; “Don’t give in to peer pressure”; and “It’s good to exercise.”

Generally, all the students interviewed thought sessions on the Life Education mobile classroom helped them learn about their health, and encouraged them to feel good about themselves. Overall, the Year 5 students expressed more enthusiasm than the Year 6 group about their learning experiences, and found it easier to recall activities and information. A number of students in the Year 6 group stated that they would have liked more time in the mobile classroom.

Some students identified that the content had changed, but the overall focus of *The brainy bunch* module was similar to previous Life Education experiences. One Year 6 student explained that they learnt about all the things the body needs (such as food, energy, and shelter) in Life Education every year, but that most of the content was new each time.

Synergies between Life Education and the classroom

When asked about the connections between classroom learning and Life Education, students identified a number of similarities as well as some differences. The similarities were mostly concerned with the connections between Life Education and school content. Students noted that what they learnt during Life Education and in class fitted together. They described how the learning experiences in the mobile classroom were followed up in class during activities that were part of the Leisure unit. One of these activities involved completing, at school and at home, sections of the Life Education student booklets.

Students commented that, compared to class work, **how** they learnt during Life Education was different. In explaining these differences, the Year 5 group focused more on the physical

environment, and the Year 6 group on teaching approaches. The Year 5 students identified a number of positive features of the Life Education environment including: a comfortable carpeted floor; singing songs; Harold; movies; and that there were more things to see than in the classroom. Students made a number of comments about the association between learning and fun. They stated that, although “school *can* be fun, Life Ed *is* fun”. One described Life Education as “interesting learning in a fun way—not just learning”. Another noted: “You don’t do any work” during Life Education, suggesting that they don’t always see a connection between fun and learning.

When talking about the differences between Life Education and school, the Year 6 group identified that Life Education offered them a range of options and suggestions about “how to pick the one [option] that suits you”. They also indicated that Life Education offered more visual resources than classroom teaching:

...you get it shown to you [visually], in class you just get it explained [verbally]...[Life Education] is a different, fun way to learn it.

The two groups had different views about the amount or type of co-operative group work that occurred at school compared with Life Education, which were likely to reflect different classroom practices. The Year 6 group indicated that whole-class discussion was common in both Life Education and the classroom, but that pair sharing was used during Life Education but not in class. The Year 5 group stated that they did more pair sharing and group work in class than in Life Education.

Students identified that some messages from Life Education and school were similar and some were different. The messages that were the same were about healthy eating and self-esteem, such as “Stay healthy” and “Stay positive”. A number of Year 5 students described the messages from Life Education and school as different because at school they talked about nicotine and “bad things”, and in Life Education they talked about healthy things. These views appeared to be contradictory to students’ earlier descriptions of discussions during Life Education about the harmful effects of drugs, and positive statements about school discussions on brain snacks. This may reflect educators’ focus on talking about unhealthy practices in nonjudgmental and positive ways.

Transferring what was learnt during Life Education

When asked if they had made any changes to their behaviour that they connected to Life Education, most students were able to identify one change, and some identified a number. There were two main areas of change. One was in managing friendships. For example, one student described how a new student came from Australia and the other children made sure she was looked after. This was also recognised as “not just Life Education, but a part of our school culture”.

Students also described how they had made healthy lifestyle changes in terms of their approaches to nutrition and physical activity. Most students described how they were eating healthier food or

decreasing their intake of energy drinks. Again, this was attributed to a combined Life Education and school focus. For example, students noted they “don’t really drink energy drinks any more (or rarely)”, and were drinking water rather than sports drinks. One Year 6 student talked about recognising that eating too much bad food had resulted in them losing concentration and feeling tired.

Summary

At Bay School, staff were passionate about Life Education, and outlined a number of key reasons for their enthusiasm. One was the skills of the educator, with staff commenting on the high quality of the educator’s teaching practice, and their expertise, enthusiasm, and flexibility. Staff could see multiple points of alignment between Life Education and school approaches. Four key points of connection were between Life Education and the school’s: Religious Education curriculum; Health curriculum; and schoolwide approaches to brain-based learning and QCT. Another key reason was students’ enjoyment of Life Education, with staff noting it provided “a little bit of magic and wonder”.

Similarly, students were very enthusiastic about the Life Education experience. From both past and recent Life Education visits they could recall a considerable amount of detail about the learning experiences they took part in, the learning that resulted, and the messages promoted during the sessions. In general, students considered Life Education to be a “fun way to learn”. Students also recognised the links between Life Education, classroom learning, and schoolwide focuses, and could describe behaviour changes that related to this combined focus.