

# A Classroom Response to HIV/AIDS— Project Proposal Writing

**H**IV/AIDS (Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is a complex and challenging global health issue. While it has generated many responses, more effort is required if the disease is going to be conquered. Since all individuals can be involved, I decided that even my high school students could contribute by writing a proposal to increase awareness about HIV/AIDS. English is a compulsory subject in all schools, colleges, and universities in Zambia, and this task-based project would not only involve the students in an important social concern, but it would also help them improve their English writing skills.

This article describes the processes we undertook to create a project proposal to confront the scourge of HIV/AIDS in our community, which included working as individuals and groups to brainstorm, draft, and revise until a final product was produced. I will also demonstrate how important it is for the teacher to

be a facilitator and participant when the goal is equipping students with the real-life writing skills necessary to deal with serious problems that affect their lives.

## **Some benefits of a task-based writing project**

English is taught and learned in Zambia as English as a Second Language (ESL), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Since the writing skill is key for all these areas, teachers should consider how to make writing topics directly relevant to the students. Students are motivated by issues that deeply affect them, such as human rights, gender equality, democracy, and health concerns such as HIV/AIDS. When students tackle topics such as these, they improve their writing skills and become active participants in solving important social issues.

Unlike simpler composition activities such as letter-writing, developing an authentic proposal educates the

whole student because it involves the use of cognitive skills (reading, researching, and planning), social skills (cooperating and making decisions together), physical and motor skills (writing and diagramming), and independent learning skills (making responsible choices and deciding how to complete tasks). Clearly, writing a proposal about HIV/AIDS allows the cognitive and affective domains to work in conjunction with each other, which can greatly enhance language learning (Brandes and Ginnis 1986). Students and teachers alike also benefit from the fact that an authentic project offers helpful strategies to deal with mixed ability classes, as pointed out by Phillips, Burwood, and Dunford (1999).

### Beginning the project proposal

The proposal writing project included the following basic stages: (1) selecting a topic, (2) brainstorming, (3) pooling responses, (4) drafting, and (5) revising. To begin, I recommended the writing project to my class and introduced a topic that is highly relevant to their day-to-day experience. According to an editorial in the *ACP-EU Courier* (2003, 1), AIDS is “recognised as the most fatal pandemic known to humanity in the last six centuries ... [and] continues to cause devastation in the world. Figures in the UNAIDS report published on 22 September 2003 make stark reading, especially concerning Africa. This continent alone has three quarters (30 out of 40 million) of the people with HIV/AIDS.” The strong relevance of this topic encouraged student participation in the hands-on experience of the writing task.

Following the selection of the topic, it was helpful to describe the setting for the project:

1. *Class level:* Forty-five high school senior male and female students. The students are principal actors and full-fledged stakeholders in the process.
2. *Venue:* District Resource Center in Monze, Zambia. The change of setting from the classroom to the District Resource Center reflects the real-world basis of the project and enhances effective teaching and learning.
3. *Mode:* Interactive Workshop. Sessions are organized to allow all students to freely participate and become actively involved.

4. *Sessions:* Five one-hour afternoon sessions during one week (Monday through Friday).

5. *Teacher role:* The teacher is a facilitator of the project and ensures that the task stays learner-centered.

### Brainstorming about the project proposal

As the next stage in the writing project, students wrote and delivered a letter inviting the District Resource Center Coordinator to a meeting. The Coordinator accepted the official invitation and attended the meeting with the students, where she offered to participate in brainstorming. Brainstorming is an essential stage in writing, as it allows the whole group to generate ideas quickly and encourages creativity and lateral thinking, and demonstrates that people working together can achieve more than an individual can (Brandes and Ginnis 1986).

The Coordinator helped the students set collective ground rules to ensure that quality questions were developed and to avoid protracted arguments. In other words, developing ground rules keeps the discussion on topic and helps to avoid wasting valuable time on extraneous issues. The following rules were introduced and accepted; these rules are generally in line with the Brandes and Ginnis (1986) model:

- We shall listen to each other.
- All of us should take responsibility.
- Participation is voluntary.
- We will keep our agreements.
- Each of us should avoid hurting others, verbally or physically.
- Mistakes are expected and one should not laugh at another.
- We should observe equality in our relationships.

In addition to these ground rules, the teacher proposed and the students agreed that the questions should seek clear and basic definitions, explanations, and descriptions.

After the Coordinator gave an overview of her work with gender equity and her long service in teaching and learning projects funded by foreign governments and other entities, she asked the 45 students to independently generate five questions about HIV/AIDS. The questions were then collected, read, and tallied on the board according to common

categories. The following five questions were selected as representative of the students' responses, which would provide the framework for further brainstorming:

1. What do the letters HIV/AIDS stand for?
2. What is HIV/AIDS?
3. How or when is HIV/AIDS transmitted?
4. Are students "affected" or "infected" by HIV/AIDS?
5. What should students do to address HIV/AIDS?

During the next stage of brainstorming, students wrote responses to each of the five questions. This elicited about 225 varied answers, which made the task of sorting them into common themes difficult. The students therefore agreed to work in gender-balanced groups and to have group members draw from a pot where all the responses were mixed together. After they were retrieved by the groups, the responses were evaluated and categorized as "good," "better," or "best."

The issue of which responses to keep was decided by putting it to a vote, and a number of responses were eliminated. Almost all the students realized and accepted the importance of focusing on recognized information regarding the source and impact of HIV/AIDS. Two eliminated responses were: "AIDS is not a medical or health condition but a bizarre thing tied to witchcraft," and "AIDS is divine punishment meted out on immoral people."

Next, the groups worked together to organize the remaining responses into an answer for each one of the five questions. They accomplished this by reading, drafting, proof-reading, editing, and finally presenting a final draft. The final answers to the questions are listed below.

#### **Question 1: What do the letters HIV/AIDS stand for?**

Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

#### **Question 2: What is HIV/AIDS?**

HIV/AIDS is a viral infection whose structure, replication, regulation, and host immune responses have not been contained or fully understood so far.

#### **Question 3: How or when is HIV/AIDS transmitted?**

HIV/AIDS is transmitted mainly through sexual contact, commonly known as unprotected sex. Other transmissions are circumcision, as well as *parenteral contact* (when skin or mucous membranes are pierced by needles, cuts, or abrasions) and *vertical contact patterns* (such as from mother to offspring), to mention only a few transmission dynamics.

#### **Question 4: Are students "affected" or "infected" by HIV/AIDS?**

Students can be either affected, infected, or both. Even if not infected themselves, students still can suffer a sense of loss because they must provide long-term care, usually prematurely, to their relatives and loved ones who are terminally-ill patients. They also have to settle overwhelming medical bills, which is an extra responsibility. Worse still, students who are HIV-positive or have full-blown AIDS become victims of stigmatization and discrimination in school or elsewhere in society. At the same time, the status of ill-health on their part as students or on the part of other persons is worsened by lack of such essentials as moral support, food, and money. Moreover, students must attend to the rising tide of orphans, regardless of their own health status. It is unfortunate that even infected or ill students must address the plight of orphans by providing for them, even in a small way, particularly in highly indebted poor countries with limited resources.

#### **Question 5: What should students do to address HIV/AIDS?**

- Students should conduct information campaigns through talks, songs, dances, posters, and drama performances about the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and the reduction of vulnerability and stigmatization.
- Students should make school-based interventions regarding blood safety and support peer-driven prevention activities such as daily abstinence pledges and scheduled access to counseling sessions.
- Students should organize programs of impact mitigation, including fundrais-

ing and collecting food, clothes, and blankets in support of children.

- Students should hold annual community festivals to encourage the care of children and arrange observances such as a “community child day” every month.
- High school students are well-placed in the community to create linkages between fellow students and well-wishers abroad that will provide material aid and moral support in alleviating the plight of both victims of HIV/AIDS and their caregivers.
- Students can produce a series of positive messages for television featuring actual individual cases of young people or students. The purpose is to educate, entertain, and inform in the hope of combating HIV/AIDS.
- Students should coin slogans and print them on shirts, billboards, and other places. For example, a slogan could proclaim: “AIDS could become

an African disease rather than a global one in the near future.”

### Final development of project proposal

During the next stage, a model of a project proposal was obtained from the UNICEF office in Lusaka, and the students used it to create their own formal proposal. Figure 1 is an example of a typical proposal format.

Using their responses and the model proposal, students developed a draft and then a final revision of their HIV/AIDS project proposal in four days. During this process a number of details of the model proposal were adapted and changed to match the written material produced by the students. (See the Appendix for the final version of the students’ project proposal.)

### Results of the project

The success of this project can be gauged by student attendance, which was excellent throughout the one-week interactive workshop. In addition, eight teachers who

**Figure 1. Sample Proposal Format**

<b>1. Statement of the Problem</b>
Describe the problem and provide causes and context.
<b>2. Rationale for the Project</b>
Explain why the proposed project is necessary to alleviate the problem.
<b>3. Overview of the Project</b>
Give general details about how the project will address the problem, the timeframe of the project, and the expected results.
<b>4. Statement of Objectives and Goals</b>
Give the overall goal and specific objectives of the proposed project, including how the expected outcomes will be measured.
<b>5. Focus Population</b>
Explain who will be the primary and secondary beneficiaries of the project, including expected results for women and children.
<b>6. Description of Participants</b>
Describe all entities who will collaborate in the project with financial, technical, or non-financial contributions such as staff time and technical assistance.
<b>7. Description of Activities</b>
Describe the logical sequence of activities and how they will be accomplished within the given timeframe. Indicate the role of different communities and groups in the project, especially women and children.
<b>8. Sustainability of the Project</b>
Indicate how the project’s impact will be sustained after the grant period is over.
<b>9. Budget Estimates</b>
Present the budget in local currency. Each budget line item must be clearly associated with specific activities.

started as non-participating observers decided to become involved and stayed on to the finish. Furthermore, the District Resource Center kept a copy of the document to give other students, teachers, and schools for future access.

In addition to promoting exceptional student attendance and teacher participation, the interactive workshop provided an empowering environment, more so than the usual classroom setting, especially for the female students who were initially shy than their male colleagues. In this case, the female students opened up and collaborated candidly about HIV/AIDS on an equal footing.

### Conclusion

In countries with high illiteracy levels, like Zambia, there is a crucial need for educated people to facilitate the essential paperwork and tasks for projects such as one to create awareness about HIV/AIDS. Importantly, the high school students who participated in the project described in this article learned a lot about developing a professional proposal and gained the capacity to plan, organize, and lead, which is an indis-

pensable human resource for a developing country with special problems in health care and education.

Students who participated in this project improved their English writing skills, and are now equipped to apply those skills in a productive way that will provide an impetus for change. Since these students are the future leaders and will be the next generation to grapple with HIV/AIDS, they must be able to combat the pandemic using all available means—including the applied writing skills now at their disposal.

### References

- ACP-EU Courier*. HIV/AIDS: Doubt and hope. September–October 2003.
- Brandes, D., and P. Ginnis. 1986. *A guide to student-centred learning*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Phillips, D., S. Burwood, and H. Dunford. 1999. *Projects with young learners*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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## Appendix 2 Group Interview Questions\*

*Reflection as a Necessary...* • Bettiana Andrea Blázquez (Continued from page 35)

1. How did you feel about the project?
2. How did you feel about working in a group? (Could you participate? Did you listen to each other? Did you help your partners?)
3. How did you organise your work in the group? (Did you work cooperatively? Did you divide the work? Did you work independently or with your teacher's help?)
4. How did you communicate with your partners?
5. What did you find most interesting or challenging?
6. What did you find boring and frustrating about the project?
7. What did you learn?
8. What would you suggest to improve the project?

(Adapted from Scharle and Szabó 2000)

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\*Students were asked these questions in Spanish so that they would feel confident enough to express their feelings and ideas.

# Appendix Final Project Proposal

*A Classroom Response to HIV/AIDS... • Smith H. Habulembe*

## **PROJECT MEMORANDUM**

Anti-AIDS Association (AAA)  
Monze Boarding High School, Monze, Zambia

### **I. MISSION STATEMENT**

To reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS among teachers and students by the year 2015 and to improve the quality of education in the school and community.

### **II. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

HIV/AIDS is real and students can be affected, infected, or both. Pupils/students are left without teachers to teach them and this has led to a reduction in the passing percentage of pupils in schools. Intelligent pupils have ended up in the streets due to poor grades at the end of their secondary education, which has been caused by teachers who are either sick for a long time or dead. Indeed, HIV/AIDS has removed many dependable teachers.

### **III. OBJECTIVES**

- A. To produce a weekly newsletter containing HIV/AIDS information for the community around us.
- B. To organize walks to alert people that HIV/AIDS is here with us and it affects even the academicians.
- C. To produce T-shirts and posters about the spread and dangers of HIV/AIDS for teachers, pupils, and the community.
- D. To write a book of cartoons showing how HIV/AIDS is spread and how strong this virus is.
- E. To hold several meetings on HIV/AIDS.
- F. To train members about HIV/AIDS and how to approach the affected people in society.

### **IV. TARGET GROUP**

All teachers, students, and community members.

### **V. PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY**

The project will be supported initially by the well-wishers, and when they pull out support will be taken up by the members themselves through affiliation fees, the selling of books, posters, T-shirts, and many other items for at least ten (10) years.

### **VI. ORGANIZATION**

- A. Chairperson
- B. Vice Chairperson
- C. Publicity Secretary
- D. Vice Publicity Secretary
- E. Treasurer
- F. Transport Officer
- G. Committee Members

### **VII. DESCRIPTION OF ANTI-AIDS ASSOCIATION**

AAA is a nonprofit organization whose goal is to sensitize its members about HIV/AIDS. It wants its members, male and female, to participate fully because the pattern of organization is gender sensitive. Its leaders will be elected using democratic rules and women will be put into positions. Anyone is free to join as long as he or she is Zambian and a teacher or a student. Affiliation depends on the member's own decision

## Final Project Proposal *(Continued)*

*A Classroom Response to HIV/AIDS... • Smith H. Habulembe*

### VIII. Budget Estimates

<b>Program</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Cost</b> (All amounts in Kwachas)
<b>PHASE 1:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting to brief school members about Sensitization Day Program</li> <li>• Election of Project Executive Committee (PEC)</li> </ul>	50	Monze Boarding High School	K 1,500,000
<b>PHASE 2:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PEC meeting: Make annual work plan</li> </ul>	10	Monze Hotel	K 1,000,000
<b>PHASE 3:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training of teachers of teachers (1 week course)</li> </ul>	30	Zambia College of Agriculture (ZCA)	K 5,000,000
<b>PHASE 4:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review meeting: Dividing the district into zones</li> <li>• Selection of zone leaders (1 day selection session)</li> </ul>	100	Monze Boarding High School	K 3,000,000
<b>PHASE 5:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marking labels on T-shirts and posters</li> <li>• Printing T-shirts and posters</li> </ul>	20	Monze Boarding High School	K 5,000,000
<b>PHASE 6:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizing a walk</li> </ul>	100–1,000	From Chisekesi Town to Monze Town	K 2,000,000
<b>PHASE 7:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing of book of cartoons</li> </ul>	20	Golden Pillow Lodge (Monze)	K 3,000,000
<b>PHASE 8:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing of newsletter</li> </ul>	5	ZCA	K 1,000,000
<b>PHASE 9:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review meeting</li> </ul>	200	Monze Boarding High School	K 3,000,000