



Lessons from the Street: An Introduction to Drug Education

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ABSTRACT

The instructional approach used in this teaching idea involves high-level cognitive and affective learning rather than passive learning through lecture, which often is the traditional, and ineffective, approach for students being educated about drugs. Objectives: At the conclusion of this drug education teaching strategy, students will be able to: (1) form opinions based on fact, (2) draw logical conclusions regarding legal and illegal drugs of abuse, (3) categorize drug samples into pharmacological groups, and (4) discuss the laws, availability and abuse of licit and illicit drugs. Target Audience: Middle school and high school students.

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INTRODUCTION

Drug abuse is one of the critical social issues of our time. As such, it is reasonable to conclude that Americans want evidence that substance abuse education and the current structures for delivering it are effective.

In 2008, Drug Czar John Walters reported that President George W. Bush's goal of reducing drug use among youth by 25% over five years was nearly achieved. While the reported use of marijuana, ecstasy and methamphetamine has declined since 2001, the misuse of prescription medications and alcohol has risen sharply. The latest drug fads among teens are pill-popping parties, with unique slang terminology. Zip lock bags of prescription drugs are often referred to as "trail mix," and gathering pills from the family medicine chest is called "pharming." A recent survey by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America found that 19% of U.S. teenagers (4.5 million) report having taken prescription painkillers, such as Vicodin or OxyContin, and stimulants, such as Ritalin or Adderall, to get high.¹

"Lessons from the Street" is an introduc-

tory drug education activity that focuses on the uses and abuses of the most commonly used drugs in America. This activity should follow a lesson on the basic types of drugs (e.g., Stimulants, Depressants, Hallucinogens, Narcotics, Cannabis, Organic Solvents) to help students categorize drug samples into pharmacological groups.

The traditional approach to teaching drug education often consists of the lecture format, which has been shown to be an ineffective teaching method.² The instructional approach used in this teaching idea involves high-level cognitive and affective learning. Students become involved in their learning by working in groups, answering questions and relating to visual materials.

OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Present an overview of substance abuse and, thereby, increase awareness of legal and illegal drugs.
- Categorize drug samples into pharmacological groups (e.g., Stimulants, Depressants,

Hallucinogens, Narcotics, Cannabis, Organic Solvents).

- List signs and symptoms of drug abuse and discuss what type of help is available for the drug abuser in the community.

TARGET AUDIENCE

This activity is appropriate in middle school and high school health education courses.

MATERIALS

- Thirteen 5" x 8" blank note cards.
- Various magazine or Internet color photographs of different drugs.
- One 8" x 10" heavyweight clasp envelope.

PROCEDURE

The instructor should complete the following steps:

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1. Print the numbers listed in Figure 1: Commonly Abused Drugs formatted one per sheet on 5" x 8" cardstock. The numbers refer to Americans over the age of 12 who reported using a drug for non-medical reasons, which is based on the National Survey on Drug Use and Health.³ Affix the cards to a wall or large blackboard in descending order, as follows:

121,000,000
59,000,000
14,600,000
7,200,000
and so forth...

2. Print sufficient copies of the Student Handout (Figure 2), which will be distributed later (See #6 in Procedure).

3. Divide the class into 13 groups with, if

possible, an equal number of students. Ask each group to randomly choose one item from an envelope containing the labeled photographs of drugs (from magazines or the Internet) presented in Table 1.

4. Ask each group, one at a time, to tape the picture of their chosen drug under the numerical label that they believe best represents the estimated number of Americans who use the particular drug. Groups rank in descending order; from most common to least, the most commonly used licit and illicit drugs.

121,000,000 [Alcohol]
59,000,000 [Cigarettes]
14,600,000 [Marijuana]
7,200,000 [S. Tobacco]
and so forth...

5. Ask each group to verbally respond to these questions:

A. Describe the type of drug that your group selected and how it is used (Refer to Figure 2). In what drug category does your sample fit (narcotics, depressants, stimulants, hallucinogens, cannabis, or organic solvents)? Refer to the National Institutes of Drug Abuse for basic information on commonly abused drugs.⁴

B. Is the drug used for medical, legal recreational, illegal recreational, or illegal instrumental use (taking a prescription drug without a prescription, such as taking a non prescribed amphetamine to drive through the night)? Refer to Table 2, in which the four types of drug use are described.

C. What are the basic laws regarding the possession of the substance your group selected? Do you think that the drug is easy or difficult to obtain?

Drug possession laws are governed by federal and state laws, which vary by state. Refer to the U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration for a detailed chart of drug trafficking penalties.⁵

D. What are some signs and symptoms in a person who abuses this drug?

What type of help can an abuser of this drug find in your community?

Refer to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration for signs and symptoms of drugs of abuse.⁶

6. Distribute the copies of the Student Handout, Figure 2: Commonly Abused Drugs by Use. If necessary, ask each group to reposition their "drug picture" under the correct numerical label.

7. Facilitate a discussion around the groups' responses, to include the following:

- Were you surprised by the number of users of any category of drugs?
- Why are two of the most widely used drugs (alcohol and cigarettes) legally available?
- Do you believe that the use of marijuana is more or less harmful than the use of tobacco products? Should its regulation differ?

Figure 1. List of Number of Users of Commonly Abused Drugs

Number of Users
121,000,000
59,000,000
14,600,000
7,200,000
4,400,000
1,530,000
1,200,000
929,000
857,000
467,000
450,000
333,333
166,000

Note: Print the numbers in Figure 1. Commonly Abused Drugs formatted one per sheet, on 5" x 8" cardstock. Affix the cards to a wall or large blackboard.

**Figure 2. Commonly Abused Drugs by Use**

Student Handout	
Number of Users	Substance (Type)
121,000,000	Alcohol (Depressant)
59,000,000	Cigarettes (Stimulant)
14,600,000	Marijuana and Hashish (Cannabis)
7,200,000	Smokeless Tobacco—chewing tobacco and snuff (Stimulant)
4,400,000	Analgesics (Narcotics, such as Darvon, Demerol, Percodan, Tylenol w/codeine)
1,530,000	Cocaine (Stimulant)
1,200,000	Stimulants (Stimulants, such as amphetamines, diet pills, Preludin)
929,000	Hallucinogens (Hallucinogens: such as Phencyclidine (PCP), mescaline (peyote), LSD, psilocybin (mushrooms), Dimethyltryptamine (DMT), 3,4-Methylenedioxyamphetamine (MDA))
857,000	Inhalants (Organic Solvents, such as lighter fluids, spray paints, airplane glue, cleaning solvents, amyl nitrite)
467,000	Crack Cocaine (Stimulant)
450,000	Ecstasy (Stimulant/Hallucinogen) MDMA (3-4-Methylenedioxymethamphetamine)
333,333	Sedatives (Depressants, such as barbiturates, sleeping pills, Seconal)
166,000	Heroin (Narcotic)

Americans over age 12 who report using drugs for non-medical reasons within the past 12 months. (Source: Department of Health and Human Services. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies, (2004). *Results from the 2004 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings (Revised: 9/8/2005)*. Washington, D.C.).⁵

ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUE

Students will have completed the activity when they are able to:

- Contribute to their group's response list of questions.
- Discuss the basic laws regarding the possession of the substance their group selected.
- Describe signs and symptoms in a person who abuses drugs and what type of help the abuser of the drug can find in the community.
- To assess the degree to which students

comprehended the content of this lesson, consider using oral or written quizzes. In addition, students can be assessed on responding to the group questions (e.g., #5 a, b, c, and d). Two or three correct responses from these four questions may be a reasonable requirement. Teacher observation and use of a check sheet are good tools for assessing correct responses.

REFERENCES

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2. McKeachie, W., & Svinicki, M. *McKeachie's Teaching Tips*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company; 2006.

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**Table 1. Photographs of Drugs**

Drug	Photograph Representation
Alcohol	Bottle of vodka
Cigarettes	One cigarette or one pack
Marijuana	One ounce in a plastic bag
Smokeless tobacco	One package smokeless tobacco
Analgesics (Demerol, or Percodan, or Tylenol with codeine)	Prescription-type white pills
Cocaine	White powder (1-3 grams)
Stimulants (amphetamines)	Small white tablets
Hallucinogens	Dried psilocybin mushrooms
Inhalants	Cigarette lighter or rubber cement
Crack cocaine	Small hard pieces called 'rocks'
Ecstasy	Flat round tablets in various sizes and colors (often white)
Sedatives	Prescription barbiturates, sleeping pills in drug capsules or tablets
Heroin	White powder

Table 2. Four Types of Drug Use

Drug Use	Description
Legal instrumental use	Taking prescribed drugs and over-the-counter drugs to relieve or treat mental or physical symptoms.
Legal recreational use	Using licit drugs such as alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine to achieve a certain mental or psychic state.
Illegal instrumental use	Taking drugs without a prescription to accomplish a task, such as taking nonprescription amphetamines to drive through the night or relying on barbiturates to get through the day.
Illegal recreational use	Taking illicit drugs for fun or pleasure to experience euphoria, such as abusing Ritalin as an amphetamine.

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6. Drug Enforcement Administration. Available at: <http://www.usdoj.gov/dea/pubs/abuse/chart.html>. Accessed June 1, 2009.