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"ENGLISH LESSONS AS A BASELINE FOR AIDS EDUCATION"

BY

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GWERU****INTRODUCTION**

It goes without saying that the AIDS EDUCATION Programme has been formalised as part of the curricula for primary schools, secondary schools and Teachers' Colleges in Zimbabwe despite some isolated echoes of disquiet from some Church groups and some parents over the recommendation on the use of condoms. This paper seeks to address how Aids Education can be presented through the English lessons. When presented through the English lessons, Aids Education is treated as a 'hidden curriculum' (Gatawa 1990:13). It is envisaged that the presentation of AIDS EDUCATION through the medium of English lessons may minimise some Churches' disquiet to having their young members (pupils) taught Aids lessons directly highlighted the use of condoms as safety precaution against H.I.V. infection. Some church groups spoke against the use of condoms by their members at AIDS EDUCATION Workshops in the MIDLANDS REGIONS. THEY contended that recommending the use of condoms is tantamount to advocating promiscuity.

This ensuing discussion focuses on specific English lessons that may be used for the dissemination of basic facts on Aids Education.

SUPPORTIVE LITERATURE TEXTS:-

In the light of what has been intimated above, teachers of English should make use of literature texts on

AIDS/H.I.V. in presenting Aids Education through the English lessons. They may make use of the Aids/H.I.V. texts that are available in schools and in the colleges of education. Such texts may include:

- (i) Aids action: Jackson (1988)
- (ii) Methods in Aids Education:
- (iii) Communicating about Aids: (Laver 1993)
- (iv) Some pamphlets on AIDS/H.I.V.

- (v) The specific prescribed texts for Grade/Form LEVELS (C.D.U.)

In addition to the texts suggested above, teachers may use cuttings from newspapers and magazines when they design English lessons with a bias on the transmission of Aids Education facts (KAMWENDO 1993:37).

This is not to suggest, however, that they should use nothing else but the suggested AIDS/H.I.V. textual sources for each and every English lesson they present. They should be free to use any other AIDS/H.I.V. source they may procure, as long as the very literature texts procured are appropriate for the Grade/Form levels of the learners for which they are intended. That and that alone should be their standard measure for the appropriacy and relevance of the supportive literature materials selected for use in English lessons.

RECOMMENDED ENGLISH LESSON TYPES:

This paper suggests that Aids Education should be presented to the pupils through the English lessons such as class debate, classroom drama, comprehension lessons, reading lessons, panel discussions lessons and through many other forms of English lessons. Lessons on the interpretation of graphs and pie charts would be most conducive to realising this objective.

For the purpose of this discussion, this places its thrust on class debate lessons and reading comprehensive lessons. The other forms of the English lessons are simply mentioned in passing in the hope that some interested readers may want to try them out in the course of their presentations of English lessons.

Prior to the debate lesson for a specified Grade/Form, the teacher should introduce his/her pupils to the relevant AIDS/H.I.V. text. These should be the ones that contain useful data on the set debate topic. Pupils should be instructed to read them for gleaning information they may need for debating purposes. They may read them in class or as an out-of-school activity.

The teacher, if necessary, may remind the class of the ethics governing the conduct of class debates e.g. addressing the chairperson, speaking audibly and convincingly, facing the audience, making polite comments on opponents and thinking the chairper-

son for the chance given.

Just before the debate commences, the teacher may instruct the pupils-audience that they should jot down all the major points made by both the proponents and the opponents so that they may use the information tapped when they do an individual written activity on the debate lesson at the end.

The debate lesson may turn out to be a lively and information-packed episode if the teacher guides his/her pupils properly during the preparation phase. As the class, debate progresses, the teacher should avoid interfering with the pupils' debating when they state incorrect facts (which they may deliberately do for the sake of debate anyway). Neither, should the teacher use facial expressions nor any other body movements to show approval or disapproval of the individual pupils' contribution to the debate. Instead, the teacher should jot down all the points of interest quietly that need to be corrected or be emphasised at the end. After the debate, the teacher may sum it up by stressing some basic facts on Aids Education e.g. how Aids is transmitted, living with people with Aids, total abstention from pre-marital sexual relations as a preventive measure against H.I.V./Aids infection. The teacher may conclude the debate lesson by asking pupils to write a paragraph or two they have learnt from the debate about AIDS/H.I.V. infection. A lesson of this nature may require time duration of two-forty minute periods for it to be completed fully.

In another English lesson, the teacher may transmit Aids Education facts through a reading comprehension lesson. The teacher may select a comprehension passage from a literature text on H.I.V./AIDS. The passage should suit the Grade/Form level of the learners concerned. The teacher may introduce some new words and phrases using some contextual clues, pictures or illustrations. This may be done in advance of the pupils' reading of the set passage in order to clear up the possible reading difficulties they are likely to encounter during the reading phase.

The pupils are then instructed to read the passage silently to prepare themselves for answering the questions designed by the teacher on the set passage. Next, pupils may be asked to go into their groups and read the very passage and answer the set questions in groups. The class reconvenes and Group Leaders present their groups' answers to the specific questions, apportioned to them. The teacher then sums up the main points and corrects noted misconceptions on Aids Education facts. The pupils may be asked to sum up the main points of the passage, in words. After marking the

pupils' written work, the teacher may provide a further feedback to the pupils. The teacher may require two lesson periods to do justice to a lesson of this nature.

More English lessons with a bias on Aids Education may be designed. They can be poetry lessons, drama lessons, panel discussions lessons or any other type of lesson not suggested in the fore-going pages. But one should hasten to advise that such lessons should be well in a given school term so that pupils don't feel that all their formal English language lessons have been 'replaced' with Aids Education lessons.

A MATTER OF KILLING TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE:

No doubt, teaching Aids Education through English lessons is a matter of killing two birds with one stone. Using this approach, each lesson objective should be two-pronged.

The above diagram illustrates how the teacher can focus on Aids Education on one hand and language communication on the other - SPEAKING, LISTENING, READING AND WRITING skills.

As pupils practice these skills in language lessons, they get to know and understand basic facts about Aids. The teacher has the opportunity to observe the pupils using language in stating their views on Aids. In addition, they get the chance to express their opinion freely in a friendly learning atmosphere. Meanwhile, he/she can wrong opinions, with regards to people infected with H.I.V./AIDS.

CONCLUSION

Presenting Aids Education through English lessons gives the learners the opportunity for benefiting from the integrative learning experiences applicable to this approach. This approach centres on teaching pupils language communicative skills and transmitting information on Aids/H.I.V. concurrently. Thus, while the learners are engaged in speaking and listening some basic facts on H.I.V./AIDS, such as: dispelling superstitious beliefs on living with the H.I.V./AIDS infected people, counselling the H.I.V./AIDS positive patients, and the dangers inherent in pre-marital sexual relations.

The paper has attempted to show that English (or any other subject) are being challenged herein to experiment with this approach so that information on AIDS/H.I.V. is disseminated while the goal of developing communicative competence is not sacri-

ficed.

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