

What is done in the classrooms today will decide civilization's survival tomorrow.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, quoted on the Caribbean Union of Teachers Web site

PROVIDING SKILLS-BASED HIV AND AIDS CURRICULA IN SCHOOLS

WHAT IS A SKILLS-BASED HIV AND AIDS CURRICULUM?

A skills-based HIV and AIDS prevention curriculum focuses on the development of “abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enables individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.”¹ The goal is not only to change students’ level of knowledge but also to enhance their ability to translate that knowledge into specific behaviour. Such a curriculum has the following elements:

- ▶ learning activities that target communication skills, refusal skills, decision-making skills and emotional coping skills
- ▶ participatory, interactive teaching and learning methods, including role plays, brainstorming and small-group work
- ▶ learning activities that are culturally relevant and gender sensitive

An abstinence-only curriculum is one approach to addressing HIV and AIDS in schools, and is developmentally appropriate for students who are not yet sexually active. However, given the young age of first intercourse in the Caribbean, students also need skills and services for protection. Any curricula should be supplemented by the Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) curriculum, which is a skills-based curriculum addressing many aspects of healthy lifestyles.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR OUR SCHOOLS TO USE SUCH A CURRICULUM?

- ▶ Over the last decade, studies from around the world have proven that skills-based interventions can promote numerous positive attitudes and behaviours, including greater sociability, improved communication, thoughtful and careful decision-making and effective conflict resolution.²
- ▶ Research demonstrates that these interventions are also effective in preventing negative or high-risk behaviours associated with HIV and AIDS, including unsafe sex, use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, and violence.³
- ▶ Because skills-based education provides numerous opportunities for student input into the learning activities, the skills that students build and practice in the classroom are easily transferable to their lives outside the classroom.⁴
- ▶ Research shows that programmes that incorporate skills development are more effective than those that focus only on transferring information (e.g., through lectures).⁵

¹ World Health Organization [WHO], *Teachers’ Exercise Book for HIV Prevention, WHO Information Series on School Health 6.1* (Geneva: WHO, 2005).

² Ibid.

³ A. Grunseit, “Impact of HIV and Sexual Health Education on the Sexual Behavior of Young People: A Review Update” (Geneva: UNAIDS, 1997); UNFPA, “2000 Strategic Guidance on HIV Prevention” (New York: United Nations Population Fund, 2002); and K. Dash, C. Vince Whitman, W. Harding, C. Goddard and M. Adler, *Applying Effective Strategies for School Violence and Substance Abuse Prevention* (Newton, Mass.: Education Development Center, Inc., 2003).

⁴ L. Mangrulkar, C. Vince Whitman and M. Posner, (Education Development Center) “Life Skills Approach to Child and Adolescent Health and Human Development” (Washington, D.C.: Pan American Health Organization, 2001).

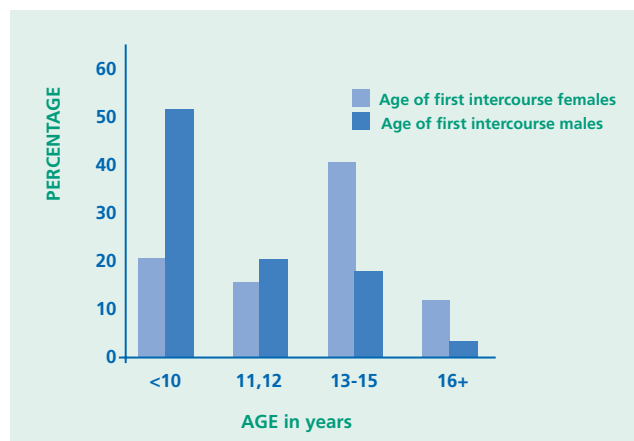
⁵ World Health Organization [WHO], *Teachers’ Exercise Book for HIV Prevention, WHO Information Series on School Health 6.1* (Geneva: WHO, 2005).



HOW CAN WE BEGIN PROVIDING EFFECTIVE HIV AND AIDS CURRICULUM IN OUR SCHOOLS?

- ▶ Implement, as soon as possible, a skills-based HIV and AIDS prevention curriculum or the HFLE curriculum (which includes HIV and AIDS prevention) throughout the education system.
- ▶ Comprehensively train educators on how to teach students about HIV and AIDS, life skills and related issues in the context of HFLE. Such training should aim to (1) increase providers' content knowledge; (2) increase providers' familiarity and comfort with participatory and interactive teaching methodology; (3) increase providers' understanding of developmental issues in learning; and (4) strengthen providers' skills in managing classroom behaviour, given that skills-based education is used primarily with large groups and often deals with sensitive topics.⁶
- ▶ Incorporate HIV and AIDS into a broad health-education approach that includes life skills, communication, conflict resolution, dealing with phobias, respect for the environment and striving to be the "ideal Caribbean person."⁷
- ▶ Ensure that skills-based HIV and AIDS prevention education starts early in primary school and is sustained through secondary school. A 2000 study by PAHO found that 22 percent of adolescents in the Caribbean below the age of 12 reported having had sexual intercourse.⁸ Early sexual initiation has been linked to numerous risky sexual behaviours, including having multiple sex partners and unprotected sex.⁹

AGE OF SEXUAL INITIATION AMONG 10-18 YEAR OLD STUDENTS IN NINE CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES.



Source: The WHO Collaborating Center on Adolescent Health, *A Portrait of Adolescent Health in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000).

WHERE CAN WE GO FOR MORE INFORMATION ON SKILLS-BASED HIV AND AIDS CURRICULA?

- ▶ UNESCO International Clearinghouse on Curriculum for HIV and AIDS Prevention: <http://www.unesco.org>.
- ▶ UNICEF. *Life Skills in HIV/AIDS Education: Introduction to Life Skills, HIV Prevention & Curriculum Development*. New York: UNICEF, n.d.
- ▶ UNICEF. *The Regional Curriculum HFLE Framework*. 2005.
- ▶ UNICEF. *Life Skills Education with a Focus on HIV/AIDS: Eastern and Southern Africa Region*. Nairobi: UNICEF/ESASO, 2003.
- ▶ World Health Organization [WHO]/UNESCO/UNAIDS. *School Health Education to Prevent AIDS and STD: A Resource Package for Curriculum Planners*. 1999. www.unesco.org
- ▶ World Health Organization [WHO]/EI/EDC. *Teachers' Exercise Book for HIV Prevention*. WHO Information Series on School Health 6.1. Geneva: WHO, 2005.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ CARICOM. *Creative and Productive Citizens for the Twenty-First Century*. <http://www.caricom.org/jsp/archives/citizens21century.htm>

⁸ The WHO Collaborating Center on Adolescent Health, *A Portrait of Adolescent Health in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000).

⁹ UNAIDS, 2004 *Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic* (Geneva: UNAIDS, 2004); and L. O'Donnell, C. O'Donnell and A. Stueve, "Early Sexual Initiation and Subsequent Sex-Related Risks among Urban Minority Youth: The Reach for Health Study," *Family Planning Perspectives* 33(6).

