

EDITED BY MARIA NORMANN AND  
ELSI VUOHELAINEN

# VIEWS ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION IN FINLAND



HUMANISTINEN  
AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU



# VIEWS ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION IN FINLAND

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# Foreword

Youth is a very special phase of life. In addition to joy, it entails a lot of expectations and stages of development with which young people need support and guidance. The task of the professionals encountering young people is to help them become socially strong adults who are able to make sensible solutions and who respect themselves and others. Substance abuse prevention is a significant part of this role and it must be conducted by utilising an approach that ensures high quality and consideration of young people.

Preventiimi - a knowledge centre for youth substance abuse prevention - aims to provide a view of substance education for young people and offer professionals in the youth sector information and opportunities for implementing their work even more effectively. Providing information in the form of publications is one of Preventiimi's modes of operation and this collection of articles published in Swedish and English is part of this approach. It is hoped that it will provide professionals operating in Finland and elsewhere in the world with useful information.

This collection of articles, entitled 'Views on substance abuse prevention in Finland', includes a selection of articles published throughout Preventiimi's history. They aim to provide the reader with a general idea of the factors Preventiimi sees as crucial in substance abuse prevention work with young people. The articles come from Preventiimi's network - thus reflecting its diversity. They all emphasise interaction, participation, the significance of ethicality, and the professional skills of substance abuse educators. Some of the texts take a more practical approach and some more theoretical; this creates a good balance, since both of these views on substance abuse prevention are required, both in Finland and internationally.

If you would like more information on substance abuse prevention with young people, Preventiimi is willing to help. Additional information on Preventiimi is available at [www.preventiimi.fi/english](http://www.preventiimi.fi/english).

We hope you enjoy reading this publication!

Helsinki, 28 May 2014

Elsi Vuohelainen

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Reijo Viitanen

## Blind spots in substance awareness education among young people and the possibilities of substance education

Young people have continuously been the targets of common social interest and the active development of youth policy has brought up challenges concerning the development of living conditions and growth environments of young people and the services offered to them. Youth work has always aimed to focus on young people in need of special support, although youth work has primarily been considered to concern all young people. Highlighting the problems of young people in need of special support has often monopolised the discussion concerning youth policy and the view of young people formed on the basis of the discussion can be considered overly problem-oriented. Although youth work does not in principle examine youth as a problematic phase of life as such, in discussions aiming at securing the resources it has been necessary to emphasise the problem-based phenomena (cf. Nieminen 2007, 38–40; Lähteenmaa 2006, 116–117).

Substance abuse prevention among young people and youth work in a wider sense are valued in Finland. This appreciation is seen in the development programmes, strategies, and goals of several administrative sectors, for example. In the actual field of operation, however, there is a constant struggle with insufficient resources and the goals set for various development programmes tend to remain as mere abstract rhetoric. Appreciation is not shown as practical operational conditions, but responsibility for the development of operations and resourcing is avoided as long as possible. Only when something serious happens are additional resources temporarily allocated as a gesture to youth work. When the acute crisis passes, re-

sources are cut and the general rhetoric concerning the worrying behaviour of young people and the death of parenting are reintroduced as topics of discussion.

In addition, the use of substances among young people has remained a key topic of discussion and continues to feature in the headlines year after year. In the news, this phenomenon is often approached from the problem-based point of view, even though substance use among young people – especially among those below 18 – has been decreasing throughout the whole of the 21st century (Metso et al. 2009). In addition to the media, researchers also often emphasise the concerns connected to the use of substances among young people or they present details with negative connotations, even though the general trend may still be positive (e.g. a press release of a school health survey, 2009). News that highlight problems can be considered justified from the points of view of attracting general interest or generating discussion and influencing the allocation of resources. Charting young people's thoughts concerning the negative image reflected in the news is sometimes overlooked, along with assessing the effects it might have on conducting educational work among young people.

Substance abuse prevention often lacks perseverance, since there are no practical conditions for organising long-term coordinated processes. The best-case scenarios are where fixed-term project financing has been granted. Separate and sporadic activity, such as lectures given by experts in the field or by the police, or 'Say no to drugs' events have proved ineffective and can even have the opposite effect, making young people interested in substances (see E.H.N.V.S. Newsletter 5 2002: 3). Although substance abuse prevention work among young people is highly valued socially and is included in political programmes, this appreciation is not shown in the form of practical activity or resources, which is required in long-term professional work.

Substance abuse prevention among young people has been searching for its administrative role both in the field of youth work and social work for the whole of the 21st century. The general quality criteria for substance abuse prevention among young people ('Reaching for the Quality Star' publication) published by Stakes (now the National Institute for

Health and Welfare) provided a common view on substance abuse work and uniform concepts for it. The quality criteria, however, do not provide any specific definitions concerning work conducted among young people. In spite of the existing regulations and the efforts for ensuring high quality, administrative reorganisations may further weaken the position and co-ordination of substance abuse work in the future. Responsibility rests with everyone at the same time, but in practice on nobody.

Substance abuse prevention among young people can be distinguished from work performed among adults, especially by its educational nature and the regulations in force – the Child Protection Act (13.4.2007/417) and the Youth Act (27.1.2007/417). Veli-Matti Ulvinen has defined the relationship between education and teaching from the viewpoint of substance abuse prevention among young people. The purpose of this article is to examine the targeting of substance abuse prevention among young people in particular, and the possibilities and starting points of more high quality substance education. The starting point of this article is, however, the defects in and problems with traditional substance awareness education.

## **Blind spots in substance awareness education among young people**

Substance awareness education can be considered a traditional form of substance abuse prevention where information concerning the use of substances and the related risks is offered to a certain target group or commonly to all (see *What is youth substance abuse prevention?* 2009, 19). Substance awareness education has been criticised for its limited methods and one-way communication (Soikkeli 2001, 67–69). The methods used in substance awareness education too often use one-way communication, and the common belief is that the distribution of the ‘right’ information among young people automatically leads to changes in their behaviour. Although information as such can be seen to be the basis for the changes and solutions people make, information delivered from outside does not automatically lead to the changes expected by the educators. The meth-

ods available in awareness education have not included any methods that are based on interaction, which would mean inviting young people themselves to participate and accepting them as active producers of information in substance-related questions. Today, all young people have their own personal experiences of and views on substances and the risks connected to them. If young people are not provided with the opportunity to genuinely participate in developing solutions concerning their own life, no permanent changes can be achieved in their attitudes and behaviour (What is youth substance abuse prevention? 2009, 22–23).

Although there are significant methodical restrictions in traditional substance awareness education, it can be criticised for the restrictions of content-related views as well. There are issues connected to the substance use – or non-use – among young people that professionals and researchers are still quite unfamiliar with. One of these blind spots is *temperance* among young people and its increased popularity in the 21st century (cf. Simonen 2009; Tigerstedt 2010). This trend has been discerned in health and lifestyle surveys and school health surveys, and youth workers operating in the field have also identified the same development. Substance awareness education among young people has not taken this trend into consideration; instead it has continued conducting substance abuse work from the problem-based perspective, manifesting the growing concern for substance use among young people. So far, nobody in youth research or in prevention work has asked why it is that not all young people are using substances. The framework of substance abuse work could be significantly strengthened by charting the factors that have been in the background of the increased popularity in temperance among young people since the turn of the 21st century.

The second blind spot is the conflict between the *trends in substance use among young people* and the general trends. No research concerning this issue has been carried out in Finland and thus it has been ignored in substance awareness education. The trends in substance use among young people over the last 20 years have not followed the trends in the rest of the population and especially not the definitions of policy by decision-makers concerning substances. For example, the overall consumption of alco-

hol during the recession of the early 1990s started to decline in Finland, but the use of alcohol and other substances among young people continued to increase. This was also the time when the so-called second drug wave hit Finland (Salasuo 2004). As the recession subsided and Finland joined the EU, the availability of alcohol increased and prices started to decline. As a result, the overall consumption of alcohol started to increase again. However, the consumption of alcohol among young people started a long and steady decline that continued into the middle of the 21st century, in spite of the fact that restrictions in the import of alcohol were reduced and prices continued to decline. Whereas the overall consumption has not increased in the last couple of years, the decline in the use of substances among young people may have stopped or even started to increase slowly (Metso et al. 2009). At the same time, there have been attempts to slightly increase the price of alcohol and to impose stricter regulations concerning substances. These actions have been justified, first of all by pleading to the need to protect young people from the dangers of substance use. The trends in substance use among young people, however, may follow their own laws and differ from the views of substance policy (cf. Tigerstedt 2010).

The third blind spot in research and substance abuse prevention among youth is the *substance-centred approach*. Awareness education lists and discusses various substances and their intoxicating effects. This question, however, remains unanswered: why does a young person decide to use or not to use substances? Many youth workers operating in the field know that the actual substance used is often not the important thing; a substance is used in an attempt to achieve something, often something related to social interaction, state of mind, or experience. The use of substances may often be a way of attempting to achieve something good connected to social interaction or a personal emotional state, which means that the substance itself is not important and has no intrinsic value. Substance abuse work, however, always considers the substance used as the starting point and the issues following its use as partly or completely negative. In this case the experiences young people have of substances and their use of them may differ significantly from the information received in substance

awareness education. Substance awareness education may be considered frustrating and uninteresting; discussion on health effects gets sidetracked and fails to connect with the experiences of young people. The substance-focused approach also encourages young people to search for and use such substances that can – according to research – be considered less harmful than some other substances. This has become evident, for example in discussions comparing the adverse effects of cannabis and alcohol, for example. This discussion has been active on online discussion forums (e.g. the [hamppu.net](http://hamppu.net) portal).

The substance-focused approach is close to the fourth blind spot of substance awareness education among young people – the *health-centred approach*. It seems safe to consider information based on medicine as objective and as the right starting point for substance awareness education. It is disregarded, however, how this information that is considered objective meets the experiences young people have (Mäkitalo 2008, 176). It is a fact that the health effects caused by the use of substances are more serious for young people who are still at a developmental age than for adults. It can be medically proven that a state of intoxication of 1 per mille in a teenager causes organ and tissue damage that correspond to the damages caused to an adult with a state of intoxication of 2 per mille. But is this the most significant risk factor in a young person's life and the related use of substances? It has been known for a long time that the most significant risk group in drink-driving and traffic accidents is young men who have just turned 18 and have recently received their driving licence. For many of them, the use of alcohol and reckless driving behaviour in practice pose a much more serious risk than the long-term health effects of substances. Similarly to other accidents, such as the use of violence or becoming a target of violence, the risk of accidents as a result of substance use among young people is significantly increased. However, substance awareness education primarily addresses the harmful effects of substances on the system and development of young people. Risk behaviour and its relationship with the use of substances has not been approached at all or discussed appropriately in substance awareness education. This point of view, however, offers easy

points of contact between the experiences of young people and the themes discussed in substance awareness education.

The fifth blind spot of substance awareness education is *believing in the power of intimidation* in substance abuse prevention among youth. It is believed that overemphasising the health risks and for example introducing the hard world of international drug-related crimes makes young people think about the consequences and effects of their actions in a wider societal sense. Strong emotions and feelings are considered to change attitudes and behaviour more effectively than the simple delivery of information. However, when examined more closely, this is a highly risky and problematic approach. Using intimidation in substance awareness education is especially problematic, because when used for this purpose, it is used for a large target audience that the educator is not familiar with. This means that the emotions caused by intimidation cannot be dealt with or discussed, but instead young people are left alone with their fears to form their individual views. Fairly often the use of intimidation only increases the anxiety of young people, who do not consider the risks related to substance use to be connected only to their own behaviour (cf. Soikkeli 2004). Concern about the substance use of a young person's parents or other people close to them may be overemphasised and strengthen their fears, insecurities and anxiety. Young people may not be able to find ways of dealing with their emotions and the support offered by their peers is not always enough. Discussing things with parents is often impossible for young people. In extreme situations, substance awareness education that uses intimidation as a method may even encourage young people to start using substances or increasing the amounts used.

The sixth blind spot in substance awareness education is *emphasising the personal experiences the educators have of substances* when talking with young people. Good results have been obtained by using 'experience educators' in care, rehabilitation and adjustment processes in the substance abuse care of adults, in services for people with disabilities, and in work conducted among people with a long-term illness (see the 'Kokemuskoulutuksesta pätevää' website, currently only in Finnish and Swedish). Discussion offering peer support connected to personal experiences and cop-

ing can – when successful – offer significant support for adults in rehabilitation due to substance abuse. Positive effects caused by former problem substance users have been seen in work with young people as well, but no closer examinations or evaluations have been conducted on the effects. However, experiences of youth workers operating in the field indicate that there are problems connected to using experience educators in education work among young people. Sometimes the stories of adventure and coping of former substance users may seem intriguing for young people and encourage them to experience something similar. It is sometimes forgotten while working among young people that an experience educator does not operate in a peer role with young people like they do when working with adults. For young people the experience educator is always an older person, an authority, a person setting an example, and an educator. The approaches related to peer support cannot be applied in this case and the outcomes of the dialogue that aims for substance abuse prevention may be the complete opposite to that which is expected. If an experience educator does not understand his role as an educational authority and fails to act accordingly, his message will probably fail to get through from the perspective of the goals set for substance awareness education.

In Finland, systematic research and monitoring have been conducted in terms of the use of substances among young people for a long time. The Adolescent Health and Lifestyle Survey (AHLS), the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD), the School Health Survey, and the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children: WHO Collaborative Cross-National Study (HBSC) are all conducted over long time periods and have robust research traditions. The methods used in all these studies, however, are strongly quantitative (Salasuo & Tigerstedt 2007). Quantitative methods enable the extensive analysis of significant amounts of material and the conclusions drawn can be used as the basis for administrative and political decision-making. However, the number of studies made using qualitative methods is still small.

The fact that quantitative research methods are much more commonly used may be the cause for the blind spots in research and substance abuse prevention. In these studies, young people are examined as an objective



target group that is independent of the researcher and the views and opinions of young people are conveyed only via the statistical classifications drawn in advance by the researchers. The young people's own voice and the various meanings they assign to the use of substances are not conveyed in this research. The viewpoints of young people cannot thus be conveyed to the practices of substance abuse prevention. Young people are examined too often merely as the targets of education and the significance of their own experiences and views is forgotten.

## **Targeting and quality of substance abuse work**

On the basis of the quality criteria set for substance abuse prevention ('Reaching for the Quality Star' publication 2006), substance abuse work can be divided into separate areas as indicated in Chart 1. Substance abuse work includes both the preventive and corrective dimension and in practice these terms can refer to many different kinds of actions, from providing general information on substances to the institutional care of substance abusers. In respect of work forms, substance abuse work can be divided into three different approaches: general prevention, risk prevention, and substance abuse care. This article concentrates on the approach of preventive work. Substance abuse care is beyond the scope of this article, because the main emphasis lies on the preventive and educational approaches.

Preventive work can be seen as general prevention or risk prevention, and the approaches and methods used in these work forms can vary. In practice, the boundaries between various work forms may not always be as strict as the chart might suggest. However, it is important that educators know from which point of view the issues are approached and how work should be targeted in order to achieve the best possible results. The blind spots of substance abuse work among young people described above are in part a result of careless targeting of work, poor familiarity with the target group, and a poor knowledge base as a background to the methodological selections. Careful targeting of the work is one of the central starting

points of the quality criteria of substance abuse work; the target group and the most suitable approaches must be known.

<b>SUBSTANCE ABUSE WORK</b>		
<b>PREVENTIVE WORK</b>		<b>CORRECTIVE WORK</b>
<b>UNIVERSAL PREVENTION</b>	<b>RISK PREVENTION</b>	<b>SUBSTANCE ABUSE CARE</b>

**Chart 1. Structure of substance abuse work (What is Youth Substance Abuse Prevention 2009, 9).**

The first question when targeting substance abuse work among young people is which principles and work forms are suitable for approaching the target group – the ones used in *general prevention or risk prevention*. General prevention refers to information, teaching or education targeted at a large and not strictly limited target group. Quite often, work conducted among young people is general prevention. Risk prevention refers to an approach in which the target group consists of a certain group or an individual whose substance use behaviour already displays certain risks. In connection with youth work, the term ‘targeted work’ is also used today to refer to quite similar work, but in a more comprehensive sense than in substance abuse issues (What is youth substance abuse prevention? 2009, 16–17).

Professionals working in the field of substance abuse prevention may at times feel frustrated if the work does not seem to yield clear enough results or the awareness education does not seem to reach the target group. In this situation, the educator should ask if the goal has been set realistically from the start, if it is possible to reach it at all, or whether there should be a re-evaluation. If the work conducted has been implemented from the starting point of general prevention, for example, the work cannot be ex-

pected to reach young people in certain risk groups or special groups (cf. Harinen et al. 2009, 96–98). Different kinds of approaches are needed for reaching these groups. Unfortunately, this is often not possible in practice and the work remains unfinished, although precisely these groups are in serious need of professional support and education.

An important factor in substance abuse work with young people is *targeting by age group*. Despite the fact that, according to the Youth Act (27.1.2006/72), people under 29 are considered young, for example, targeting must be much more accurate in substance abuse work. Reaching 18 is a very important milestone. In work with young people under 18, the age limit must often be emphasised, as in practice substance use is prohibited to under 18s. In work with those who have crossed this threshold, the main emphasis is on highlighting the responsible use of substances and the control mechanisms related to the young person themselves, and the operational environment (What is youth substance abuse prevention? 2009, 10). In practice, work conducted among young adults compared to work conducted among young people under 18 is quite modest at the moment. Also in work conducted among young people below 18 years, it is important to evaluate the personal experiences of young people in substance use. Even if young people do not have any personal experiences of substance use, they are likely to be able to evaluate the substance use of people close to them or express their opinion on the matter.

An essential part of targeting preventive substance abuse work is selecting the subject matters and points of view from which substance use among young people and the related risks are approached. Instead of focusing on the substances used or the related health effects – the approach criticised earlier in this article – more attention should be paid to the social situations to which the substance use or non-use is connected to. If a young person is using substances alone on a regular basis, he already has some serious problems connected to his mental health or life management and immediate action is required. The use of substances is above all a communal mode of operation connected to social interaction. Social control, norms and values are always connected to social interaction and these are

expected to be followed in the community. Communities also use these factors for regulating and controlling substance use on an individual level.

The segregation into general prevention and risk prevention provides a good foundation for targeting substance abuse prevention, although it only enables the achievement of factors that mainly impact on the individual level. This approach does not necessarily allow us to reach questions on the social level concerning substance use among young people. Targeting work at the individual or group level requires different approaches and tools. These issues are not covered in the quality criteria set for substance abuse prevention or other general guidelines.

So-called *heavy sociality* has been seen to be connected to the drinking habits of young adults (Törrönen & Maunu 2005, 278). The term refers to discreet and intrinsically highly-valued time spent together that deepens social connections, friendships, and related experiences and meanings between young adults. Communication is considered to improve and intoxication is considered to facilitate the building of close relationships that can be meaningful later in life as well. The behaviour of young adults while intoxicated may not always be uncontrolled messing around, but several regulation mechanisms and restraints are connected to it. The state of intoxication and its effects are assessed in relation to pleasant moments spent to together, and intoxication is consciously monitored. If substance use becomes extensive, it often means ending the social moment. Similarly, on the individual level, substance use is often followed by phases of self-evaluation with attempts to restrain and even out the use of substances (see Törrönen and Maunu 2007). Substance abuse prevention is often stigmatised by the image of young people using substances without any control or sense. The social regulation mechanisms influencing young people themselves are not sufficiently addressed. They should be reinforced in order to prevent substance use. They could provide unexpectedly valuable information for developing substance abuse work and improving its quality.

Jenni Simonen (2007) has drawn a detailed classification of the types of social aspects of drinking among young people and she has managed to distinguish at least three different types of sociality in substance use situations. One type of sociality is called *unrestrained sociality*. Sociality con-

nected to the use of alcohol with good friends can be highly unrestrained and relaxed. This means a complete breaking out of everyday life with its roles and responsibilities and the purpose is a hilarious state of social interaction. However, it is possible to get carried away and the risk of accidents may be high. Some form of control is often connected to unrestrained sociality as well and there may be attempts to control the behaviour of those who get carried away. It is not possible to stay completely sober in these situations, however, but everyone is expected to use substances in order to reach a common social state.

The second type of sociality Simonen (2007, 41–47) calls *tactful sociality*. It does not try to exceed the everyday norms and rules or to free oneself of them, but the essential thing is the intrinsically highly-valued time spent together. Substances are not overemphasised in situations of spending time together, although they are a part of the situation. Often alcohol is found to make the social interaction more active and helps to obtain shared experiences and emotional states. It is also possible to abstain from drinking in these situations without any pressure being targeted at those staying sober. The substance use of an individual is restricted by the control of other people and attempts to drink at the same pace as others. If the use of substances causes problems, the result is a shared experience of a ruined evening and disappointment towards those who were not able to sufficiently control their use of substances.

Simonen calls the third type of sociality in substance use (2007, 48–55) *individual-focused sociality*. In this case, it is not the common and communal experience of the social situation that is essential, but the individually achieved experiences or emotional state. The event of using substances is used for reaching support and acceptance for one's own, sometimes selfish, goals. Social acceptance, admiration, or getting attention are closely connected to those individual purposes linked to social events of using substances. The fun event is considered unsuccessful if the result has been a negative state of mind or the person has been left out of the situation. Excessive discussing of one's personal issues instead of having fun can weaken the experience of individual sociality. Aiming for a personal positive state of mind or social acceptance and attention are efficient means of

restraining the excessive use of substances. The fear of humiliation helps to keep the use of substances at a moderate level.

Identifying the different types of sociality in substance use and behaviour while intoxicated could provide more ways of approaching young people from the perspective of substance abuse work in different kinds of situations. And even though approaching young people specifically in substance use situations would not always be possible or functional in an educational sense, the experiences could be assessed and discussed in other connections. In any case, the social nature of the use of substances and the situations of using them must be taken into consideration more carefully in the practices and approaches used in substance abuse work. It diversifies and supports the targeting of work more efficiently than the division of the work into general prevention and risk prevention. The control mechanisms that are created and that have effects in social situations among young people and the intrinsic norms and rules connected to substance use would help substance abuse workers to better identify the factors that should be strengthened. Considering the social aspects and emphasising the responsible ways of using substances are essential viewpoints in substance abuse prevention among young adults.

When examining the social features of substance use among young people, the examination of the *social structures* of the groups should not be forgotten. Hardly any studies in this area have been carried out. There is always some kind of social structure or hierarchy in groups of young people that regulates and controls the operations of the group and the behaviour of its members. Targeting substance abuse prevention at those who control the behaviour of others in social structures would enable us to genuinely access the mechanisms influencing the social life of young people. This would also open up new opportunities for understanding the behavioural rules and norms created in social relations and which influence them.

One perspective for targeting the work and for the social relations is the assessment of the *confidential relationship* between the workers and the young people that can also be considered as a significant dimension of communal interaction. Substance abuse prevention among young people

and the educators of the field have justly been criticised for the lack of trust in young people. Substance use among young people is often approached from a highly problem-centred viewpoint, and the behaviour of young people is easily interpreted as problem behaviour that requires certain measures. Young people are seen as the targets of the work without seeing them as having much effect on the contents or goals of the work. Adults and professionals are considered to know what is best for the young people. The lack of trust has been emphasised, particularly in projects aiming at influencing drinking by young people in public places (see Korander & Soine-Rajanummi 2002; Törrönen 2004; Lähteenmaa 2006). The lack of trust can form a serious obstacle for the interaction between substance abuse workers and young people. In the worst case scenario, this can result in playing cat and mouse while working among young people and young people starting to avoid the educators. In this kind of game, the mouse is often quicker than the cat and thus young people manage to hide. This means that the risks and problems related to substance use cannot be dealt with; they are simply hidden.

The danger of stigmatising and being stigmatised are an important dimension in building trust. Targeting the work at risk groups is essential, but how is it possible to conduct targeted work without unnecessarily stigmatising the targets? Being stigmatised as a problem user of substances is scary for any young person and at worst it can exclude him from important social relationships and working life (Heikkinen 2007, 19–23 and 60–61). Although there are good reasons for emphasising the differences between general prevention and risk prevention on the practical level, this division must be regarded critically as well. Too strict a categorisation of individual factors can result in inequality and division. People belonging to the risk groups are easily labelled as belonging to lower social classes or even incapable of independent life, as people who require control and supervision for an indefinite period of time. The difference between well-intentioned support and strict control is sometimes hard to define. Building a confidential relationship and committing to cooperation are, however, essential elements for obtaining the desired results in targeted work and risk prevention among young people (*ibid.* 64). This requires the worker

to understand their substance use as something else besides a problem that must be dealt with.

## **Towards comprehensive and communal substance education**

Instead of offering traditional substance awareness education and facts, Kirsi Sirola (2004) and Outi Mäkitalo (2008) encourage the emphasising of the significance of education in substance abuse prevention. Young people must be offered something else besides information on different substances as they form their opinions on substance use. The personal growth of a person, management of social situations, and understanding of wider social dimensions must be taken into consideration. Substance education cannot simply be a question of telling someone the facts about some specific substances and the assumed effects of using them. It is a question of a multidimensional subject matter.

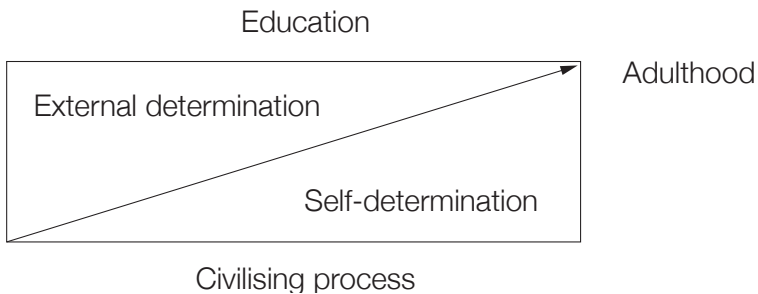
The points of view could be extended and substance abuse prevention could be deepened by modifying traditional substance awareness education towards a more focused and comprehensive substance education both in respect of its goals and modes of operation. In this context, education must be understood as an extensive process in which young people are connected to society and its norms and values systems via the civilising process. Young people are entitled to obtain information on substance use and the related risks. They must understand the social factors connected to substance use and be able to act responsibly in various situations. The effects of substance use on the level of the whole community must be kept in mind as well.

An educator should support and help young people to form – by utilising all information available and their own experiences and the educator's experiences – such entities based on understanding that can help them to responsibly assess and control their own use of substances (cf. Ulvinen). In this case it is not simply a question of modes of operation and instructions concerning certain substances or the situations of using them. The purpose should be to enable young people to independently assess their own



behaviour and to knowingly control their operations and attitudes concerning different kinds of substances and situations of using them. This means achieving what is termed the metacognition level in the individual learning process that includes conscious assessment, choosing and consideration (Hakkarainen et al. 2005, 233–236). On this level a person can control his learning and make decisions related to it independently.

The general education process can be described briefly as follows: a person grows older and gains experiences, gradually takes his life in his own hands and becomes less and less dependent on educators. This process has been illustrated in Chart 2 where the process has been combined with the concept of civilising. This approach can also be applied to substance abuse education and to assuming the responsible use of substances.



**Chart 2: Relationship between education and civilising (Siljander 2002, 36).**

Setting an educational target in substance abuse prevention among young people seems simple from the perspective of older generations: young people must be kept away from substances and the related risk factors or they must at least learn to use substances responsibly. This starting point does not, however, consider the views of young people themselves and for this reason it often remains an external order only, which is not always accepted. Young generations want to make decisions that may seem foreign to older generations. Siljander (2002, 201) describes this situation as tension between education and civilising. The younger generation that has not yet been socialised to live in the world surrounding them may be able to create solutions that are more creative than those made by the previous gen-

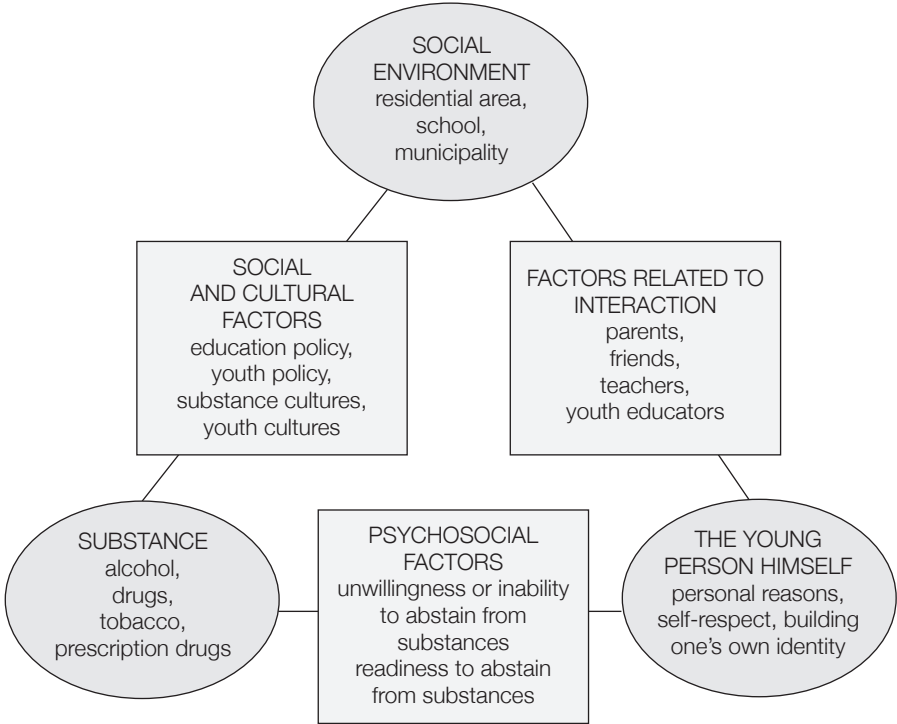
eration. It is essential to recognise the tension between the present and the future as an influencing factor in substance education among youth. Modes of social operation and control and attitudes to substances can be completely different than before in the world of young people.

The younger generation can make different decisions in their civilising process than the previous generation did. However, this requires them having the opportunity to construct their own civilising process and influence its contents. Trusting young people to be able to make different decisions than the previous generation concerning the use of substances requires trusting in their abilities. The civilising process always creates something new and unpredictable. When substance education is understood to also include the learning of social skills and responsible behaviour in different kinds of situations, space must also be given to the recipients of education.

Implementing comprehensive substance education requires that the blind spots of traditional substance education are identified and removed. Furthermore, the active input of young people themselves and identifying their role as the producers of new information is the starting point for their participation in substance education. Chart 3 describes the operational environment and the related essential factors connected to substance use among young people; these should be included as the starting points for substance education as well. In summary, it could be said that the purpose of substance abuse prevention is to support young people to form their own opinion on the relationships presented in the chart.

Substance abuse prevention often emphasises the significance of early intervention. Risky behaviour and the reckless use of substances naturally require intervention, but simply intervening is rarely sufficient. Intervention as such is not a solution to the problems caused by the substance use of a young person. Intervention must include providing support as well. Without sufficient support, the young person may find the intervention an annoying or troubling experience which can thus cause indifference or even resistance to the substance abuse workers. Young people learn to avoid the services offered to them, and a confidential relationship cannot be built if young people only experience negative interventions. The

support offered to young people must include a consideration of the life situation of the young person as a whole and identifying the specific needs concerning substance education. In the end, it is a question of supporting the young person's own resources and strengthening them – and this requires the active input of the young person himself.



**Chart 3. Multidimensional nature of substance abuse prevention (adapting Newcomb 1994; Sirola 2004, 139).**

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**Tomi Kiilakoski**

# **Opened bottles, the Devil's piss and the livers of alcoholics**

## **Drafts for participatory substance education**

The most beautiful Finnish songs are about longing and the kind of love that is so delicate and fragile that it seems to concern the afterworld more than everyday life. Beauty awaits in the distance, on the other side of the ocean or in paradise. The funniest songs are about alcohol. Intoxication is a hilarious state, people mess around when they are drunk and we think that it is funny. It provides good material for great songs as well. You know, something like this: “You stormed to the bar drunk as a skunk / ordered a pint / not ready to call it a night / Trying to chill out / But the bartender kicked you out” (free translation)<sup>1</sup>. This is funny, at least to me. Even if the longing is targeted at the afterlife, the songs that are about heavy drinking are strongly rooted in this world. Beauty awaits on the other side. But everyday life is here and it includes worry, work and fun, and of course booze and drunkenness and – as a result – freedom. If this seems familiar at all, you must admit that alcohol and drunkenness are parts of the world where fun comes from in Finland.

Alcohol and other substances affect us all; even those who abstain. Numerous cultural conventions, attitudes, and norms are connected to substance misuse. These can seem either repulsive or intriguing. They create strong reactions – both positive and negative – and few react indifferently towards them. People can access a lot of information on substances and the related behaviour patterns. However, substances also cause problems. All in all, alcohol does not harm the problem groups alone - the harmful effects extend to everyone. And that includes me. Examining this cultural position requires information, honesty and openness. It is not enough

to simply be aware. Action is required concerning the feelings and beliefs that we as a culture connect to alcohol.

## **1 Martti Servo & Napander: Tillin tallin. (In Hittirähinä.)**

Positive attitudes towards alcohol create quite a difficult dilemma for educators. On a personal level, for most people the problem presents itself in the use of alcohol in situations that usually have positive connotations. “Going partying” or “going out” are expressions (in Finnish) that refer to positive feelings connected to alcohol. Thus, the problem on a personal level is that most people use alcohol and enjoy it even if they know that it causes social problems. If the adverse effects of alcohol or other substances are discussed with young people, the subject is difficult to deal with in a way that also brings up the experiences that the educator has of the subject. It may be difficult to connect the educator’s experiences to the educational encounter in which the experiences of the educator and student meet, interpret the world, and discuss in a fair and honest manner. It is thus challenging for the educator to honestly deal with her own experiences – and it is anything but easy to face the world of young people as well.

In addition to the personal level, there is the cultural dilemma as well. Strong positive experiences may be connected to the use of alcohol and other substances in youth cultures. Identifying these factors may sometimes be crucial in order to be able to understand what makes people drink. Traditional substance awareness education focusing on the adverse effects of substances may collide with the cultural meaning-making for young people. Substance abuse educators must decide whether to use language and other cultural capital that may be foreign to people or whether they should take a risk and use the language of the young people, without having any certainty of the outcome of the discussion.

In my article, I won’t define the contexts of providing substance education and I won’t analyse the target group. The emphasis will lie largely on young people and substance education. In addition, I will not examine the changes taking place in education when working with people with severe substance addictions. The purpose of my text is to discuss the consequenc-



es of participatory education in accordance with critical pedagogy on substance education.

I will approach the question of substance education by examining it in accordance with critical pedagogy as a process that is based on a dialogic relationship and in which issues are seen as targets of discussion and common meaning-making, rather than seeing them as a ready-made information structure that an individual must accept. It is a question of participatory education. Next, I will examine the Finnish discussion around participation in order to highlight the views of participation it has presented. After this I will examine – mainly in light of popular culture – what kinds of views and meanings are connected to alcohol, and I will sketch the ways in which educators can encounter the challenges that are present in this field.

### Education as a process of building a common world

According to the view of education presented in critical pedagogy, people are educated by a number of agents, such as the media, advertisers and other people, through direct and indirect interaction. Institutional educators – for example schools and publicly funded youth workers – do not operate in a vacuum. They function in a field already filled with actors. In the current culture, these actors are in a situation where they are surrounded by entities that are trying to influence the young. According to critical pedagogy, one cannot assume that education works on the basis of some kind of neutral starting point – for example by presenting a neutral scientific institution – and in this way people would be able to adopt the correct attitude to substances. Instead, educators should identify their position among the range of other actors and to attempt to take their place by utilising methods that promote participation.

The Brazilian father of critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire, criticises what he calls the “banking” concept of education, in which the recipients of education are seen as empty accounts to be filled with content. According to Freire, the functions that are referred to as education are often more like indoctrination. Operations can be considered as indoctrination if individuals are not given the opportunity to operate, but instead they are

forced, dared, or deluded into adopting a way of thinking forced on them from outside, without giving them the opportunity to consider their own relationship with the phenomenon in question. Examples of indoctrination include cases of brainwashing, resulting in the adoption of a new religious perspective, or political education in which children and young people are led to think and behave as expected by an external party. If education turns to indoctrination, it aims to make recipients of education accept an existing state of affairs, to adapt to the power structures accordingly and to consider the situation as the normal state of affairs, as something that simply is as it is, without any opportunity to influence the situation. (Kellner 2003, 56.)

When applied to substance education, Freire's criticism is targeted at such operations that aim at making people adapt to a substance-free way of life or a lifestyle that promotes the moderate use of alcohol, or to accept that a certain substance is prohibited for those aged under 18, even though the same substance gives great pleasure to those over 18 who are also happy to spend the little spare time they have using it. Operations may start to resemble indoctrination if education does not genuinely allow discussions on how alcohol might affect the lives of children and young people and to ponder what kind of meanings are connected to it. Education makes people free and opens new doors, but indoctrination closes doors and limits the freedom of people. As boldly expressed by Freire, many educational projects have failed right from the start; "Many political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality, never once taking into account (except as mere objects of their action) the-men-in situation towards whom their programme was ostensibly directed." (Freire Paulo, 1972, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London: Penguin Books. p.66. Italics in the original version.) It is precisely the consideration of the situation in the lives of people and emphasising their active role that distinguishes genuine education from mere force feeding, storing information and forcing it into people's minds.

The idea of the banking view criticized by Freire is that the educator knows the real state of affairs better than the recipients of education. Ac-

According to this view, it is crucial to get the recipients to adopt the offered information at its most original form without their own views ruining the correct information. The main problem with this point of view according to Freire is that it does not take into account the active role of the recipients, their linguistic resources, or their actual situation in life. Furthermore, it does not examine the effects of the wider social processes. It is education that consciously tries to isolate itself from the world in which the recipients of education live. Freire sees this as oppressive education: it does not aim to provide people with new opportunities to operate; instead it aims to lock people into the narrow space reserved by the educator in advance.

According to Freire, education should not be about making people behave in a certain way. The starting point for education is the requirement to free people. Its purpose is to increase the opportunities people have to function and to make them see themselves as actors that have the power and the possibility to present their own opinions. Information included in the education does not exist in some objective sphere, but it is formed within one process, in which the educator and the recipients of education gain insights again and again by constantly asking questions in cooperation with each other. (Freire 2005, 76.) The educator should make the situation easier and help people to understand the circumstances that affect them and that have made people in many respects who they are. There is an optimistic element present in Freire's philosophy: by changing people's views, it is possible to make people act in order to improve their own lives. As a result, society will become less repressive. (Hannula 2000, 45.)

Freire regards the process of education as one that aims for *conscientização* – learning to perceive social and political conditions. The purpose of education is to make people aware of the framework that provides the structure and limits for their action. By this Freire refers to the development that makes people regard themselves as part of the social order. People gain a critical distance to factors that have moulded them. In substance abuse work, this can be learning to perceive the effects of the alcohol use of a family member, for example, or examining how attitudes in the environment have moulded a person's own views and examining the pro-

cesses that affect people with various cultural backgrounds as they negotiate their own relationship with alcohol.

Freire emphasises that educators cannot act on behalf of the recipients of education. Instead, they should create possibilities, a framework, but not write a complete script for the recipients to follow in the future. The social and cultural situation is considered in the analysis and the issues discussed can be, for example, why in certain circumstances the use of substances is considered acceptable. Educators should be honest and open. The purpose of education is to face the world as people face it in their own life. Thus the purpose of substance education is to approach the factors that are connected to the use of alcohol. It can start for example by examining the relationship between alcohol and pleasure or alcohol and violence. As the band Eläkeläiset says: “As you step into a bar / you can forget your worries / you can get your fill / and forget everything. / Just dance the night away / Everything is right / And you can also fight” (free translation).<sup>2</sup>

In connection with his critical analysis, Freire emphasises that education should not create feelings of dissatisfaction or hopelessness. The purpose of education is to feed hope. People should not simply settle for what they have, but instead they should see that they have opportunities to change things and improve the framework that prohibits them from acting. – From the viewpoint of substance education, it is thus possible to encourage people on a personal level to change their own behaviour, but also on a communal level to build various programmes to influence the use of substances.

bell hooks has developed Freire's ideas about the essence of education further. bell hooks – the pen name of Gloria Watkins – represents the feminist variant of critical pedagogy. According to hooks, her pen name is a result of feminist thinking. Feminists wanted to avoid academic star cult status in which the focus is on the person rather than the ideas. By selecting the name “hooks”, Watkins wanted to connect herself to the feminist community that aims at intellectual development and the change in ideas instead of pursuing fame and money. (hooks 2006, 107.) hooks sees Freire's thinking as strong and inspiring, but she thinks that it requires

further development. In her own theory, she emphasises the consideration of people's emotions. She sees this as an important starting point in education.

## **2 Eläkeläiset: Humppakonehumppa. (In Humppa-akatemia.)**

bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress. Education as the Practice of Freedom* provides an introduction to her ideas. In this book, hooks discusses her thoughts on transformative education. The book suggests the factors that should be taken into consideration in education.

She emphasises Freire's idea that educators should have the courage to face the recipients of education openly. According to Freire, the starting point must be that the act of education is not about those who know educating those who don't. Instead, it should be about a group of people building their relationship to the world together. According to hooks, this also requires educators to perceive their vulnerability and to be able to take part in discussions as one actor among others. This is especially emphasised, according to hooks, if the subject requires the recipients of education to take risks. A comprehensive education – which considers the person as a whole – also requires that educators become stronger and empowered in the process. They must acknowledge their own vulnerability as well. (hooks 2007, 51.) Most people have both positive and negative feelings about substances and these feelings can often be quite strong.

hooks emphasises that educators must create a dialogic relationship with the recipients of education. They must be able to hear the voice of the recipients. They must learn “how to listen, how to hear one another” (ibid. 225). Education situations should not mean silencing - the various ways of experiencing things must be allowed and be expressed freely.

When applied to substance education, the views of Freire and hooks emphasise that genuine education discusses phenomena together with people. Education does not follow a certain script, but it tries to understand the world that defines people's relationship to substances. An educator must also be ready to hear the voices he does not agree with and

he must trust the recipients to be responsible enough and able to form their own opinions. However, this does not mean that educators cannot have strong opinions themselves. An educator does not have to discard his own values, but he must not enforce them. If anything, values and starting points are prerequisites for the educator to be able to work together with other people.

According to Paulo Freire, education should start from a situation whereby the existing reality is recognised. It should also be in a language that the target group can relate to. In addition to these requirements, Freire presents a requirement concerning dialogue: education should not be simply providing information on behalf of those who know the real state of affairs to those who are yet unfamiliar with the topic. Instead, Freire says that educators should create dialogue, and opportunities for encountering other people. hooks adds that education should touch people comprehensively, without disregarding the strong influence feelings have in the process. Their views create pedagogy in which the participation of the recipients of education is crucial.

Participation means taking an active role and sharing power

As a concept, participation has a long history. The Latin word “participare”, from which the word “participation” originates, was used in theology in the Middle Ages to describe a man’s participation in the idea of God, for example. This term was used for formulating a theoretical presentation of relationships between things and entities. It also enabled the examination of what kinds of larger entities items were connected to. The concept of participation enabled people to perceive the unity of the world. (Elders 1993, 218.)

Although for most people the theological dimensions of participation are unknown, this concept also carries its original meanings. Participation is still used to describe the ways in which people are a part of some larger entity, such as a group, school, political decision-making group, or society. Participation usually refers to the starting point of passive involvement. It refers to active participation in a group operation or at least the possibilities people have to adopt many different kinds of roles and to act as rec-

ognised actors. As a concept, participation has both descriptive and prescriptive sides.. Participation or lack of participation enables the analysis of what kinds of possibilities for action people have in their environment. On the other hand, participation is often used as an prescriptive, i.e. normative, concept: the concept is used for evaluating what items are like and also for answering the ethical question what they should be like.

Discussing participation often aims to provide people with more possibilities to influence their environment. There are several social-philosophical reasons for promoting participation. Participation deals with increasing possibilities to influence and to adopt several different kinds of roles. It is possible - according to the early Frankfurt school, for example - that as democracy develops, a society of free people must be formed where people can freely communicate with each other and where individuals have the sufficient courage to examine things critically and present their own opinions. (See Honneth 2006, 343–344.) A participating person can participate in the functioning of society and react to any defects he discerns - strongly, if necessary. Naturally, it is not possible to become a free member of society at once; it requires practice and growth. Somebody must also be the educator.

Participation is mentioned today in many types of official documents. When the national curriculum was renewed in Finland in 2004, there was an emphasis on participation. The importance of participation was emphasised in various official reports and increasing participation was required in several different contexts. For example, it was required that the “[e]ducation system should require more participation that supports the strengthening of the civic society and provides people with tools for life management” (translated from Lehtikoinen et al) 2002, 8). These kinds of requirements indicated that participation was considered a means for developing the civic society, increasing interest in politics, and offering people feelings of success. In the 21st century, “participation” has become a concept that enables us to examine the ways in which children and young people can influence things. Discussing participation was used to react to the increased division in Finnish society, into the better off and the worse off, and for reacting to the crisis of the political system, in which the in-

terests among young people in renewing the political system by voting seemed to be constantly decreasing. Fairly quickly the discussion around participation started to expand. The possibilities for ensuring the participation of all young people were discussed. In addition to discussing the activation of marginalised groups or politically inactive young people, the opportunities of young people to influence their immediate surroundings were discussed. Participation became a conceptual tool that enabled the examination of people's opportunities to participate in the operations in their surroundings and to feel a sense of belonging to the wider society.

Participation is not a method or a way of action. It is more like an attitude that respects children and young people and that can become a practice in several different ways. Participation can ultimately be seen as a pedagogic project that aims at educating children and young people to become members of society, to show in practice what it is like to operate in a democratic society that listens to its members, and sees them as capable and skilful actors. This starting point connects the view of education presented in the critical pedagogy to participation.

Seeing participation as an educational project enables the view of education being targeted exclusively at individuals to be broken. For example, learning has traditionally been understood to always be about individuals. This view is used for constructing education that concerns individuals, but does not consider the social and societal environment the individuals live in. (Hager 2005, 660–661.) A view of education that highlights participation breaks this starting point by emphasising that in addition to individuals, attention should be paid to groups that the individuals belong to and to the power structures that they participate in. Learning is thus seen to have both an individual and a communal dimension.

As discussion concerning participation develops, more and more areas of human life can be included in the debate. It can also be investigated how participation can be ensured in different services, decisions and ways of relating to the world. In substance education, this question can be specified in terms of how substance education projects can ensure that children and young people are able to present their own views so that their identity is respected and that they feel confident enough to express their



honest opinions. From the viewpoint of participation and the division of power, it is possible to ask how different roles are offered for children and young people that enable them to become responsible actors instead of simply operational targets.

In the background of participation and critical pedagogy, there is a shared view that people should be able to participate in matters concerning them and to engage in dialogue whereby power settings do not override other points of view. In substance education this is important also because substances are a part of the way of life and how people function. Simply seeing the destroyed liver of an alcoholic may not change people's opinions, because alcohol is more widely connected to the entity in which individuals can see themselves as being important.

One's relationship with substances is not based on information alone: people are fairly well aware that substances are harmful to their health. However, this information alone may not make people act. Finnish social psychologist Antti Eskola notes that attitudes towards health issues are not based on information alone, but it is a question of way of life – the way a person feels about the environment she lives in. Substances do not form a separately entity in people's lives, but they are connected to the operations people find important in their life. (Eskola 2009, 91–92.) For young people, the use of substances may be connected to approaching the opposite sex, to operating in a certain subculture, or to breaking away from the chains of society, or to simply just having fun. The use of substances should thus, at least at times, be examined in terms of how they are connected to the lived environment of individuals. In understanding the action of individuals, you must listen to the individuals themselves and let them participate.

A requirement for dialogic education is that people's opinions and views on substances have already been taken into consideration. Young people grow into the use of substances both at home and with their peer groups, and also when interacting with various media channels. Those working in substance education operate in a network that aims to change the attitudes and behavioural models of the targets of education (young people). Positioning oneself in this network requires information and un-

derstanding on how youth culture meaning-making moulds young people's view on substances.

### Devil's piss and THC

The views on substance work sketched on the basis of Freire's and hooks' ideas indicate that when action is considered as education, it means facing the uncertainties, ambiguities and irregularities of everyday life. Items are not located in a certain framework where right and wrong are in a clear order. People are not divided into those who know and those who do not – for example concerning the adverse effects of alcohol. Instead, there is a group of people who together try to interpret how separate items are located as parts of a larger entity and how people see themselves in relation to that entity.

According to educational philosopher Paul Standish, education should primarily be something that does not present its contents as the final truth that should be accepted as is. Instead, it should provide several ways of seeing the world. It should encourage people to discuss questions that are at times difficult and disturbing. An educator should have some kind of relationship to these questions, whether through admiring, wondering or fighting. (Standish 2004, 497–498.) Standish presents the connection between critical pedagogy and the traditional Western view on education that emphasises that education is not a question of forcing ideas on people or making them adapt. The purpose of education is to open windows and enable an individual herself to face difficult issues and to try to face them exactly the way that suits him.

Next I will try to briefly describe how it is possible to answer to the challenge of offering a participatory and dialogic way of working in substance education. I will sketch this issue from the viewpoints of moral concern, cognitive operation, and meaning-making in youth cultures.

The adverse effects of alcohol have been known for a long time. When fighting these effects, the purpose has been to make people aware of the social and individual harms caused by excessive use of alcohol. As an example, I can mention Lars Leevi Laestadius, the founder of the Laestadian revivalist movement, that is still going strong, especially in my home

district in North Ostrobothnia and Lapland. This movement is strongly committed opposing alcohol and promoting temperance. Laestadius' father caused problems for his family. He was an alcoholic who had ineradicable effect on Lars Leevi, who consequently was strongly against alcohol later in life. Among other things, he started to call alcohol the Devil's piss. Indeed, the problems caused by the Devil's piss were serious in the 19th century Lapland: the use of alcohol made the social problems caused by poverty worse and strengthened the existing repressive structures. Laestadius started to fight against the evil of alcohol. (Pursiainen 2000, 8–9.)

The curse of the Devil's piss started to subside due to Laestadius' efforts. Craving for alcohol turned into temperance. From today's perspective, you cannot help but admire the lively and strong language used by Laestadius. It also paid attention to larger entities beyond individuals. It seems that it resonated in the eardrums of the people of the time and encouraged them to abstain from the use of alcohol. Today this kind of language would probably not be used in substance awareness education: one mistake that's easy to make is to demonize substances and, as a consequence, the people using them. If alcohol is the Devil's piss, the users of alcohol are thus labelled as thirsty heroes who slake their thirst by drinking the Devil's piss. According to critical pedagogy, explanations that people themselves fail to accept cannot act as the starting point in their education.

Consequently, one of the pitfalls in substance education could be the presentation of descriptions and perspectives that do not relate to people's lives. This can be especially harmful in situations where an externally expressed point of view creates a strong moral reservation, claims something to be harmful, wrong, bad, or even something that comes out of the Devil's urethra.

One easy solution to the question of what should be offered in place of moral pronouncements, if they are forbidden, is to emphasize that the other alternative can also be pure information. It is possible to provide unbiased and objective information that is indisputable. An example of this is presented on the back cover of the Nuorisotyö magazine, in issue 8/1981. There is a photo – published by Alko to promote awareness edu-

cation – of a small child leaning against a table, upon which is a glass and a beer tankard. The text in the bottom left-hand corner addresses the reader: “A child’s liver cannot process alcohol. This is why you must not give alcohol to your child, not even medium strength beer. Act responsibly.”

This old advert uses a principle familiar from substance awareness education. The reader is told the evident and truthful fact about a child’s liver not being able to process alcohol. This information is used to draw the conclusion that a child must not be given alcohol. Is there some problem in the advert then? – It treats the reader as a child as well; someone who must be explained things in words of one syllable. It explains things as simply as possible. In addition, it fails to state that most often medium strength beer is given to young people whose liver can tolerate a few bottles, but their head often cannot.

The purpose of presenting the example mentioned above is to indicate how problematic substance education can become, unless the question is posed directly to the target group, and if it is not discovered how people feel about substances and what kind of meaning-making is connected to substances. Many of these may include trains of thought that are unfamiliar to educators and some of them may seem dangerous. Nevertheless: education means that people are not brainwashed into operating according to a specific model, but instead a process is started in order to enable disagreements, disputes, and differences in opinion.

Substances are a part of our culture, whether we like it or not. We are still intrigued by the Devil’s piss, as well as other substances. The message from the products of popular culture that approve of alcohol is not self-evidently in favour of alcohol. Instead, the interpretations of the products of popular culture allow for different kinds of interpretations and they may include many different messages. For an educator these products offer tools for initiating discussions and determining how people see the meaning of the messages. (See Kiilakoski 2007, 64–66.) This offers a starting point for discussing the context for controlling, forming and limiting the use of substances.

If we concentrate on music as one of the central areas of popular culture, we can find several examples that promote the use of substances. If

we analyse unreleased songs about substances, we can find a range of messages that clearly encourage the use of substances. For example the song “Hamppukaupunki” (Hemp city) by Kapteeni Ä-ni indicates that in youth culture substances are connected to feeling good and relaxed and having a true connection between people.

*So let's find a hemp city,  
a more beautiful city,  
yes, let's find a hemp city,  
a more beautiful city,  
There are people smoking joints at every street corner,  
and you may see a police officer there as well,  
and everyone takes it easy,  
and everyone feels good,  
And there is nothing to worry about,  
and pot doesn't get you in trouble,  
and everyone gets their share,  
so let's move to the hemp city. (free translation)<sup>3</sup>*

Popular culture can create a space where alcohol and drugs are seen as a free area that is the opposite to a society filled with control, discipline, and pressure to conform. In the “Hamppukaupunki” reggae song, a city filled with cannabis is presented as a place of freedom where people are not stressed by discipline; instead, a state of freedom achieved by the unrestricted use of cannabis connects people. Police officers also take it easy and people do not have to worry about the machine of violence. “Hamppukaupunki” describes a fantasy world where the hedonistic use of substances is connected to love and peace. It is crucially important for educators to recognize these ideas and to be able to discuss them as part of the educational programmes that aim to clarify people’s real attitudes and ideas concerning substances. It should also be possible to create processes that enable us to understand the issues that substances are connected to.

### 3 Kapteeni Ä-ni: Hamppukaupunki. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HXnWzw7Zdo0>.

Live recording. In the discussion section, comments related to the song include the following:

"This is cool!" "Tough guys!" and "Fuck, this is a great tune!"

When you start to think about substance misuse, it quickly becomes clear that it is not only about the relationships between young people and substances. Substances seem to help create relationships between young people and with the society they are growing up in. According to Heidegger, human existence (being in the world) is about Being-with others. He suggests that people interact with each other in a world already filled with meanings. The world is an entity where ideas, phenomena and objects all belong to the same framework. The world where encounters take place has already been a target of concern. It has been cared for, meanings have been identified in it and it has become one's own along through actions. According to Heidegger, this world has become what it is as a result of the presence of other people. Being alone is possible only because you can withdraw yourself from the company of others. (Heidegger 2000, 150–164.) Heidegger emphasizes that the examination of human operation on the basis of an individual alone has already taken away the original world experience from the individual, his living with other people.

The use of substances cannot be regarded simply as something that is limited only to the health of an individual. A young person living in the world encounters substances and as he uses them, he answers questions concerning himself and the world at the same time. For example, the identity of a young person who uses drugs is created as he uses drugs. He faces the culture with practices, operations, and arrangements related to drugs. Some he can discard and some he can identify with. He can exceed his own limits, break the norms of society, or escape from his personal issues. Drug use and intervening in it is a question of identity; a young person's interpretation of who he is or who he would like to be. (Väyrynen 2009, 108–109.) From the point of view of education, this means that

discussing drugs often requires mapping the relevant context in which the drugs are located. This examination may be extended to areas that the educator feels uncomfortable with.

Substances, similarly to other cultural tools, are located in a vast cultural landscape. Although we can focus on a detail of the landscape, we should remember the landscape as a whole as well. When we try to understand the use of substances, we may also have to process other entities extensively. Therefore, operations related to substance education can quickly expand to other areas. Paul Standish has stated that all education is citizen education and it includes the seeds of moral education. According to Standish, all education deals with these questions, since if morality and citizenship are taken seriously, they exceed to all areas of life. Education cannot thus be discussed separately from questions of what is right and in what kind of society we want to live in. (Standish 2004, 498.) Naturally, Standish does not try to say that all education should deal with these questions. He states that the questions discussed in education cannot be isolated from their social background and that there are large questions in the background of the detailed field of phenomena, and these questions may need to be dealt with if education allows the use of genuine, significant questions.

The work of educators is nowadays more difficult than before. There are several actors in the field. As the pedagogic authority of adults has started to crumble (see Furedi 2009), we cannot automatically expect that the message of educators will reach young people. Thus, educators should work among the recipients of education, as participatory actors among others. Freire reminds us that we should avoid simply banking our education – we must engage ourselves in a dialogue. hooks adds that educators must recognise their own vulnerability – which may not be easy with substances, at least if we value honesty.

### Education requires openness

Critical pedagogy is based on a strong requirement that education cannot simply be about distributing information or rooting a behavioural model brought from outside to the recipients of education. It must be an op-

eration performed together with the recipients of education. In this operation, participation is ensured by involving people in various activities and thus creating a culture of commonality. This poses an educational challenge, because there is no predefined idea, but people form their own opinions independently. Facing this challenge may seem difficult. It may lead to us asking why we should start this kind of process, if the end result cannot be regulated and the targets set by the educator or her organization may not be achieved. Critical pedagogy offers an answer to this question: if you want to educate, you must accept the active role of the recipients of education as well, even if the results may be poor from the educator's point of view. The purpose of education is to develop and promote the active role of the recipients of education.

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Sanna Pylkkänen and Elsi Vuohelainen

# Ethical operational principles of professional substance education

Encountering young people in the field of substance abuse prevention requires a sensitive approach. Many factors must be considered, but from a professional's point of view it is essential that the encounter is also ethically sustainable. Ethicality goes hand in hand with quality; undefined values or methodologically questionable work cannot be of high quality. This is why it is important also in substance abuse prevention among young people to ensure that certain ethical operational principles are followed. Principles of professional ethics describe the common systemic view of the field on the qualities of right and good and wrong and bad operations. Ethical operations are based on the idea that moral problems are solved on the basis of what is considered right and what is considered wrong (Jujärvi, Myyry and Pessa 2007, 13). Ethical principles describe the views maintained in the field and they in many respects create the identity of the field.

Many fields have their own ethical principles that are followed in all operations and they can differ significantly from each other. This creates its own challenges for creating ethical operational principles for substance education, because there are educators from several disciplines, all of whom follow the ethical principles of their own field: youth workers, teachers, school nurses, parish workers, social workers, etc., to mention but a few. Substance education is not based on necessity or external supervision. It requires committing to cooperation and to the values of each profession implementing it. Quality control of substance education cannot really be outlined with the current structures in a way that all participants can be offered equal information and skills concerning substances. For this reason, the professional substance education needs ethical instruc-

tions that encourage all educators, organisations and clients in the field to conduct their own supervision and that communicate to the various entities in society what substance education is all about in the 2010s.

In this article, our purpose is to chart the ethics of professional substance education when working with young people under 18. Since the educators operating in the youth sector come from various fields – as described above – it is difficult to determine the features that depict the common interests of young people in substance education. However, it is possible to list some requirements. This article is influenced by the ethical principles of several professional groups and fields and the discussion on the ethical operational methods utilised in youth work. This article is part of the charting of good practices of professional substance education (*Ammatillisen päihdekasvatuksen hyvät käytännöt*) published by Preventiimi in 2012 that consists of reports, workshops and articles.

## Identifying the target group in substance education

Antti Maunu (2012, 156–157, 146) emphasises that in order to be influential, the dialogue related to substance education targeted at young people must comply with their values and respect their views and experiences. Put simply, it can be said that understanding substance education should be made as easy as possible for young people. One method for achieving this is to offer information on substances for young people in small packages in the language they understand best. This does not mean, however, that young people should be talked to in their own style or that educators should view substances in the same way as young people. Educators must be confident enough to disagree with young people and express their views as adults, and by utilising their own expertise help young people to find the answers to questions they cannot answer themselves (*ibid.* 48). Considering the views of young people and listening to them helps understand the contents of substance education and it also makes the communication more fluent. Being listened to is an important part of the encounter.

In order to facilitate an encounter that takes young people into consideration, the starting point of substance education should be identifying

the target group and targeting the discussion by considering the needs of the young people. The educator must be as familiar with the group as possible before starting to talk about substances. It is also crucial to be able to identify the trends connected to youth cultures and attitudes towards substances. Defining the target group is also essential when selecting the method to be used in substance education. According to Jatta Herranen (2010, 29), the method selected defines both the limits of the educator's operations and his own role as an educator. Selecting the method also has a significant effect on the functionality of the interaction between the educator and the target group. If possible, the following issues must be considered as a minimum when planning substance education (Pylkkänen, Viitanen & Vuohelainen 2009): 1) Age of the young people: it can usually be assumed that 11-year-olds have different needs concerning substance education than 16-year-olds. When the target group consists of young people above 18, the principles of education are significantly different than with younger target groups, because their situation is different in terms of legislation. 2) Size of the group: it is very important to know whether substance education is offered on an individual level, for a small group, or for example for all school pupils in Year 7 in order to select the type of education given and the methods best suited for the purpose. 3) Experiences and backgrounds of the group: different kinds of groups require different kind of substance education, depending on how much experience they have in substances and which substances are topical for them. It is crucial to determine whether the group needs social reinforcement, general prevention or risk prevention. It may be considered, for example, that educators should not talk about addiction to those only thinking about dabbling with substances, whereas with those who are using substances extensively it is too late to discuss the reasons why substances should not even be tried. It should be noted that defining target groups is not always easy, because the criteria used for differentiating groups from each other are not straightforward. The attitudes and behaviour of young people vary from person to person, and they cannot be defined according to a certain age or reference group. For example an 18-year-old does not necessarily have any more experience of substances than an 11-year-old, or not all members of

a certain group need information on the harmful effects caused by the use of cannabis. It is essential to consider the features of each target group and to adapt the substance education offered according to the needs of that specific group (Maunu 2012, 15–16).

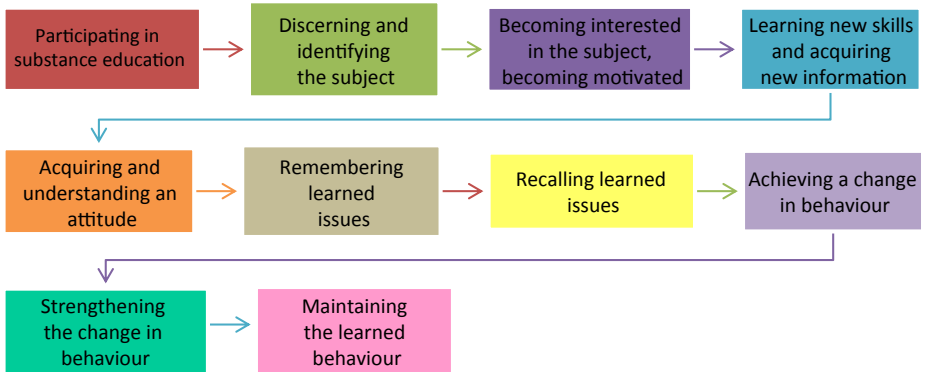
## Long-term substance education

One of the most common and faulty assumptions concerning substance education is that a change can be achieved in the attitudes of young people immediately after the education has finished. The concept of information-attitude-behaviour theory (Thorsen and Anderson 2000) is unfortunately still common and it influences several new approaches to substance education even today. This is unfortunate, because when entering the 2010s, several theoretical frameworks have been examined more closely (e.g. the theory of knowledge-based education) and these have been found to better match the reality facing young people today. Information-attitude-behaviour theory includes an idea of rationality in the behaviour of a person and of the process in which the offered information is converted to the right kind of attitude which has a direct and immediate effect on behaviour. Typical characteristics of the information-attitude-behaviour model are the substance-centred approach and risk awareness education. Markku Soikkeli (2002, 35) uses the term ‘syringe model’ to refer to expectations according to which when offering substance education to young people, it should have an immediate effect – similarly to an injected drug – and change the attitudes and behaviour of the young person as expected.

Preventiimi has applied this approach – the idea of the long-term process and the challenges connected to the management – and McGuire’s communication theory and created its own interpretation:

Chart 1 (on the next page) indicates that the information-attitude-behaviour model cannot be applied to substance education. The attitudes and behaviour of a young person cannot be changed at once, but the change consists of several phases, and several variables can be connected to each phase. It is impossible to indicate clearly in substance education which factors have influenced the forming of young peoples’ attitudes

towards substances, because each young person is an individual and substance education situations have different effects on different people. Furthermore, there are other factors, such as friends, family or changes in life situation, that affect the thinking and operational models of a young person. This is why it cannot be assumed that one single substance education interaction can change a young person's attitudes towards substances, and it is impossible to regard a substance education interaction as a failure if the recipients' attitudes towards substances have not changed immediately.



**Chart 1. Transforming substance education into a new behavioural model (adapting Pykkänen, Viitanen & Vuohelainen 2009, 23).**

Substance education has an effect on young people. Salasuo (2011, 18) quotes Matti Piispa, who refers to awareness education campaigns as follows: ‘They are droplets that are barely visible alone, but together with other droplets they can form a strong current that over a long period of time is able to erode even the hardest terrain’ (translated from the original Finnish text). Piispa talked about awareness education, but his view can be applied to substance education as well; a single encounter is probably not enough, but each short substance education intervention has its own role in achieving a change. In order to change a young person's attitudes and behavioural models concerning substances, substance education must be continuous and offered over a long period of time.

## Substance education is a combination of information and skills

The responsible professional operation of a substance educator is based on information and professional skills and on the values and norms the work is based on. It requires the continuous maintenance of professional skills. It says in the ethical principles of substance abuse prevention drawn up by the National Institute for Health and Welfare that ‘information provided on substances must be based on facts’ (translated from the original Finnish text) (THL 2012). The substance educator must remember that he is an unbiased expert whose message must be based on objective observations made on the basis of the latest studies of the field and their critical evaluation, and other factual information. Young people want to hear facts, and their trust in substance education weakens if the provided information is found to be incorrect or if an adult cannot indicate what the information is based on. In addition to knowing about substances, a substance educator must also be familiar with the methods in use and he must be able to state the reasons for using the chosen methods in the target group in question. Antti Maunu (2012, 41) states that in order to be able to influence the drinking of young people, a substance educator ‘must know enough of the background of the young people and the goals individual people try to achieve with their drinking and other operations’ (translated from the original Finnish text). Thus, the facts extend beyond the actual substance-specific information. In order to stay up to date in his work, a substance educator should be able to update his information by reading, interacting with other actors in the field and statistics, and accounts available concerning the themes of substance education, the research informatiby attending seminars and events.

Although there is quite a lot of research information, one does not provide answers to all questions. There is a lot of ‘silent’ information among substance educators. Silent information refers to information brought along by professional skills and experience and that has not been researched or written down. Substance educators are allowed to utilise their silent information as well – and this is also recommended – since it brings



new tones in substance education situations and it helps to examine research information correctly. It is, however, essential to remember that in order to enable the work to be ethically sustainable, all solutions made in substance education must be reasonably founded.

A competent substance educator examines things from a wider perspective than his own and engages in dialogue with the young people in his role of a professional. High-quality substance education is provided from a professional's perspective – not from a parent's. Also professional volunteers can have a professional role, since those people working in substance education can have several different kinds of professional competence and expertise in very different fields. Substance educators should not talk emotionally about their own experiences, but instead they should focus on the needs of the target group and on the goals set. Educators must also show with their behaviour and operations that they are worthy of the trust and respect they are shown in their work.

Substance educators must assess their own competence in their work and its limits when accepting new tasks and respect the expertise of the representatives of other professional fields. When the limits of expertise are reached, help must be requested from other parties to ensure the best interests of the young people. Multidisciplinary cooperation is important in substance abuse prevention. Substance educators face issues in their work that they cannot be held responsible for by themselves. For example, they may become aware of information that falls within the scope of the Child Protection Act (13.4.2007/417). Section 25 of the Child Protection Act includes the requirement by which everyone is obliged to disclose information when the child's best interests so requires. This requirement concerns the majority of the professionals working with young people. It includes situations where a young person tells a substance educator something that falls within the scope of the disclosure requirement or legislation that requires ethical consideration and evaluation of one's own motives and goals. In substance education, responsibility is bound by the defining norms, such as the legislation. In the school environment, the responsibilities can be seen as parallel to the norms set for teachers' work (see OAJ 2012).

In taking care of his tasks, a substance educator is also entitled to fair treatment. A substance educator is not obliged to divulge his own experiences of substances. Professional substance education is work in this respect. It is not based on the experiences of an individual substance educator, for example as a parent, and his substance use is not essential. Instead, substance education is interested in the feelings, experiences, views and attitudes of young people. It encourages them to think about right and wrong, everyone's right over one's own body, what good friendships are like and why, for example, the use of alcohol or smoking is so important to some and not at all to others. The goal and target group are young people and their needs in substance abuse prevention.

## **Substance education via participation**

Tomi Kiilakoski (2010, 146) says that 'It is precisely the consideration of the situation in the lives of people and emphasising their active role that distinguishes genuine education from mere force feeding, storing information and forcing it into people's minds'. One of the central issues in substance education is considering young people and their participation. Participation means letting young people take part in the planning and implementation of substance education as active actors and producers of information, not simply as recipients. It enables making substance education personal and allows young people to have an influence. Young people must be given a voice in substance education, a means to express themselves and their thoughts. According to Herranen (2009), young people find substance education in part frustrating, dull or repetitive, which could possibly be avoided by letting young people participate in planning the type of substance education to be provided.

It is essential to try to create an environment that enables participation in which cooperation between a substance educator and young people is equal (Ali-Melkkilä 2009, 138). Enabling participation requires a substance educator to be ready to work in cooperation with young people and to have courage to provide space for their thoughts. If young people are allowed to participate in the planning and implementation of substance ed-

ucation, they must be given real opportunities to influence the process (although the final decisions are always made by an adult). Young people are entitled to be heard in issues concerning them and they often have a lot to say about substances. Their experiences with substances do not mean solely their own experiences, but also those of their close communities and the everyday life they live. By engaging with young people, educators can gain information on the problems that should be addressed in the area in question and how the education would best reach the target group.

Participation can be implemented to various extent. Young people can be involved in the planning of substance education from the start or participate in the completion or implementation of an idea developed by an adult. It is however crucial that a young person is given an active role in substance education, which is a significant factor when comparing substance education and substance awareness education; education refers to an interactive and comprehensive encounter and awareness education to one-way delivery of information.

## **Substance education that respects young people**

In his book 'Miten puhua huumeista' (How to talk about drugs) (2002), Markku Soikkeli describes propaganda and indoctrination in drug awareness education. Propaganda refers to the purpose of influencing attitudes and behaviour by offering mere half-truths; only information that is favourable for the message of the educator. Persuading young people to think in a certain way, without allowing them to form their own opinion at all, is propaganda at its strictest. Purpose-oriented information offered from a position of authority (that a substance educator always has in a group situation) is always propaganda, no matter how good the intentions are. Simplifying one-way substance education does not develop the abilities of young people to think independently, which can be considered an important goal in substance abuse education among young people (Soikkeli 2002, 56–58). Propaganda appeals to myths and feelings in ways that direct young people away from issues that are important to them (Puolimatka 1997, 355; Soikkeli 2002, 56). Indoctrination means education in

which, for example, the contents of substance education are transferred to a young person without the young person himself having any opportunity to evaluate its validity. Kiilakoski (2010, 146) describes indoctrination by saying that it closes doors and restricts the people's freedom, whereas the purpose of education is – on the contrary – to open doors and free people. Substance education that is based on 'one way or another' thinking is not ethically sustainable, but instead manipulating. Unethical education as a method weakens trust and interaction between people. It diminishes communication between people, whereas this should be one of the mainstays of substance education (Puolimatka 1997, 228.) As a counterbalance for the ideas presented, an educational intervention promotes the diverse development of the personality of the young person and supports his development into an independently thinking person. It is thus largely a question of how substance education is conducted, not so much about the contents of the education.

Intimidating young people about the consequences related to the use of substances without considering their development stage can create concern in the young people over their own well-being or the well-being of the people close to them. This kind of worry should not be caused as a side product of substance education. Each substance educator must respect the privacy of people and their personal values and avoid judging the life situations of individuals, even indirectly. In substance education in particular, when a target group consists of young people under 18 and possibly also younger classes in basic education, frightening substance users is not advisable.

In order to encounter young people as they are, it is also important that the educator learns to recognise his own attitudes, prejudices and stereotypes that can influence the ways he acts in substance education situations (Juujärvi, Myyry and Pessa 2007, 98–99). It is not necessary for a substance abuse educator to forget his own personality and set of values in substance education situations. Rather, it is essential to acknowledge the factors that could lead to less favourable outcomes for the young person in order to be able to avoid this in everyday work. A good substance abuse educator accepts that the measure of a good life for a young person and

the methods for achieving it can differ from those of the educator, and in spite of this he aims to reach a common understanding of the contents of substance education without forcing them on others (Maunu 2012, 48).

## In summary

The purpose of the ethical principles mapped out in this article for substance abuse prevention with young people is to act as guidelines when substance educators assess the ethics of their work. One essential step towards ethical substance education is that the substance educator thinks about the matter in hand. This factor alone indicates that it is not completely insignificant how substance education is conducted and that the purpose is to offer education that serves the needs of young people as effectively as possible. Each substance educator makes his own assessments and draws his own ethical operational principles on the basis of his work and professional background. Ethicality in substance education is seen in small details, such as how young people are talked to, what reactions their thoughts and ideas elicit, or to what extent they are allowed to participate in the interventions. These are small deeds that in the long run can help us to achieve large changes and the right kinds of attitudes.

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**Antti Maunu**

## **Elements of prevention: sense of community, groups, and social trust**

During the 21st century, prevention has become an important and influential point of view in mental health and substance abuse work. The reasons behind this are both humane and economic. From the humane perspective, the prevention of problems is always better than helping people after the problems have become intolerable. Furthermore, corrective services are also expensive. For example, the cost of the care of children placed outside the home was approximately 620 million euro in 2010 (Heinonen et al. 2012, 7–8). This is two times higher than in 2004 and is about the same as the annual costs for the provision of upper secondary education or the police. The annual costs of one child placed in institutional care could be used to finance seven years of intensive family therapy or 3,000 hours of home help service, for example (ibid. 34). The same logic can be applied to mental health and substance abuse work. The prevention of problems is a better and less expensive solution than the hurried and expensive correction of serious problems.

But what is preventive work in practice? I will start in this article from the idea that good and efficient preventive work should not concentrate too exclusively on visible and concrete problems. Of course they must be understood, but it is even more important to understand the invisible reasons in the background that are the source of the actual problems. Only then can we influence the actual reasons causing the problems and prevent the problems from becoming worse.

In this article I will focus on the social factors which have an impact on the background of problems related to substance use and mental health. In my opinion, the main reason for these problems is that people do not have – or have not had – a clear, strong, and rewarding social position in their everyday living environment. This creates a circle of weak or negative



social emotions that affects thinking, operations, self-image and relationships. This kind of social environment predisposes people to all kinds of problems, risk and problem behaviour, exclusion, etc.

From this perspective, the most important thing in the prevention of problems is to ensure that all people have good, appreciative and rewarding groups and communities around them. This enables them to receive immediate positive feedback that is an important part of health and well-being. However, it is even more important that there are groups that enable their members to operate independently in a way that they can join other rewarding groups later and to operate in these groups and maintain their own role within them.

## **Sense of community, health and well-being**

In social science, there has been a lot of discussion on the sense of community in the last few decades – or on social capital, as it is often called – and its effects on health and well-being. According to a number of studies, a sense of community or social capital prolongs life expectancy and reduces illnesses irrespective of age, sex, education or living environment. It provides people with a sense of better health. It strengthens self-respect and improves self-image (e.g. Hyyppä 2002; Ferlander 2007; D’Hombres et al. 2010.) Furthermore, the sense of community has been proved to improve academic performance and school satisfaction and it increases the completion of studies. Good social atmosphere makes attending school and studying as a whole easier, more pleasant, and efficient (Salmela-Aro 2011; Martinez 2001).

From this perspective, the sense of community can also be seen as an important part of well-being in the prevention of problems related to substance use and mental health. The cause of these problems can be seen as a result of a lack of sense of community, i.e. these problems are usually always accompanied by problems with social emotions and their control. For example, my own studies concerning the use of alcohol among young people and young adults indicate unanimously that drinking together is part of an attempt to gain intense social experiences together by the group

members. Problem drinking usually starts when the members of a group are not connected by anything else other than alcohol and thus social experiences are sought only with the help of substances (e.g. Maunu 2012a and 2012b). Depression – which has become a serious problem – can be seen as a chronic experience of an individual not belonging to this world and feeling detached, inadequate and like an outsider. Depression can be described as a gaping pit between one person and others (e.g. Huttunen 2009).

## **From a sense of community to groups**

When evaluating issues from this point of view, a clear conclusion can be drawn and utilised in the actual work: increasing and strengthening the sense of community is an efficient way of preventing problems related to substance use and mental health. On this level, this issue seems fairly simple. However, this point of view does not provide answers to two important questions: what is sense of community and how can it be built or reinforced? There is no common understanding of these questions like there is on the effects the sense of community has on health and well-being. There are several definitions for the sense of community and thus instructions on how to develop it, some of them competing or even conflicting (e.g. Korkiamäki 2013; Ferlander 2007).

It is not necessary, however, to examine the various definitions in this article. Instead, the purpose is to find a viewpoint from which we can make the preventive work understandable, functioning and efficient in practice. In my opinion, the sense of community doesn't really exist at all and thus discussing it is to some extent misleading.

Instead of the sense of community, there are communities, or to put it even more concretely, groups. People cannot have consciousness or sensation as such. Consciousness is always consciousness of a certain matter; sensations are always sensations about a certain matter. Similarly, the sense of community is the feeling of belonging to a certain group and the feeling of being able to trust this group. Lack of sense of community means that interaction in these groups does not work, or that there are no func-

tioning groups at all. Thus, it can be said that a sense of community is interaction that takes place in ordinary groups – school classes, families and work communities or among groups of friends. From this viewpoint, the questions are much more concrete and easier to answer than when the sense of community is seen as some kind of abstract, conceptual entity that nobody can achieve.

The following quote describes the functioning of a poor group by using negation, i.e. what the situation is like when there is no sense of community.

I remember feeling mistrust and lack of appreciation in my work community. It made my job very unpleasant. I tried actively to avoid the people who showed mistrust towards me. In the end, the mere thought of seeing a certain sourpuss started to annoy me. My work became unpleasant and coming to work started to feel more and more difficult each morning (Heikkinen & Huttunen R. 2002, 278).

The poor state of the work community described above is connected to its poor social atmosphere. The atmosphere of a poor work community is cold, grouchy and depressing, and it erodes the self-confidence and operational ability of its members. Similar effects can be discerned in negative family, school, and student communities. If this kind of atmosphere is present for lengthy periods of time, people will become prone to physical and mental health and substance abuse problems, because this kind of situation is unbearable for everybody. People get sick or start to look to compensate for it from some other more rewarding activity or community. In Finnish culture, alcohol seems to provide a seemingly easy comfort in these situations – which can be dangerous in the long run. In modern society, it is also typical to diagnose people living in the kinds of environments described above as depressed and treat their depression chemically, although the actual reason for the problem is social. In these situations, corrective work is an obvious alternative and people can't or don't want to use the opportunities offered by preventive work.

Fortunately the person quoted above also has experience of working in a positive work community:

I have also worked in work communities where I have been trusted and people have believed in my abilities. It has made me want to do my job even better. At its best, receiving recognition has led to a situation where the work has started to reward the worker. It has become a pleasure. Together we have managed to achieve much more and to a higher quality than any of us could have achieved alone (ibid. 278).

A good work community is a result of recognising and appreciating other people and their work contribution. This creates positive reactions and an environment where people can flourish and work runs smoothly – which deepens the trust and increases recognition even further. It is important to note that recognition is always given and received on a reciprocal basis. The feelings of appreciation or lack of it are reciprocal in the previous examples as well. They concern not only the person telling the story, but also other members of the work community (ibid. 278). This is what the sense of community is in practice: appreciating and rewarding interaction taking place within a good and functioning group. The location of the group is irrelevant. A sense of community can exist at work, school, home, or when partaking in a shared hobby. The essential thing is that the group functions.

## **A sense of community means social trust**

What good groups do to their members can also be called social trust. Social trust is internalised appreciation and recognition, a feeling that I matter to others as well. Social trust defines how a person expects other people and the surrounding world to react to him.

If there is lack of social trust, a person thinks that others are only trying to take advantage of him or to make a fool out of him. A person thinks that plotting is connected to everything. When the mental landscape is like this, only bad experiences and encounters meeting the negative presuppositions are filtered in. This creates a vicious circle that weakens the social trust even further (Kortteinen & Elovainio 2012).

If there is plenty of social trust, people see the world as a good place to live in. Socially trusting people believe that others want good for them and

they also feel that they can influence people and things around them. This also leads to positive development. Gaining good social experiences increases social trust which in turn improves one's readiness to participate in rewarding social situations in the future (Kortteinen & Elovainio 2012).

This is the logic that the sense of community uses in improving health and well-being in practice and prevents problems related to substance use and mental health. An environment encouraging social trust strengthens mind and body. It also provides its members with readiness for building and maintaining positive social groups for their own part in the future. And vice versa: if there is no social trust in the living environment, a person is at risk of having problems. At the same time, he is less likely to enjoy positive and rewarding social environments later in life (Rimpelä 2013).

## Social trust and participation

Social trust does not belong solely within the field of psychology or social work. Research has shown that it is strongly connected to political activeness and trust in social institutions (Myllyniemi 2012). If a young person feels that the world will delude him anyway, why would he try to influence his own environment by using conventional and accepted methods? He is not likely to be interested in student unions, youth organisations, youth councils, voting, or other political or organisational activities (see also Kantola & Lauriala 2013).

A more typical mode of operation in this case is to step aside from common – and sometimes personal – activities or alternatively to resort to methods that are dangerous or even illegal. Criminal organisations and hate communities are the choices of people who have the lowest levels of social trust. These groups are seen as the last safe havens - social appreciation and recognition can only be found by taking drastic measures, because elsewhere they have not been available.

Those with high levels of social trust and the related social confidence tend to get involved in politics and other activities approved by society, and they are also the ones who often benefit from it the most. This is nat-

urally a good thing for them, but it may distort the political system. The voice and interests of those better off and otherwise doing well seem to have more and more influence in social decision-making. This can be seen for example in voting behaviour. The voting turnout is at its lowest among the worse off, and among the same group social problems and criminality are most common (e.g. Elo & Rapeli 2008; Rikollisuustilanne 2012).

From this point of view, strengthening the sense of community, i.e. social trust, is also politically and legally important. It increases the levels of equality, democracy, and internal safety for the whole society. Also, from an economic perspective, it is obvious that strengthening social trust is both reasonable and profitable. Strengthening social trust among people helps to achieve savings in the social welfare and health care system. In addition, it is clear that a socially trusting person is also a more productive worker and has a longer career than his colleague with low social trust who is thus at risk of problems related to substance use, mental health and social exclusion.

## Finland rises in groups

The sense of community, i.e. social trust learned in groups, is always a positive thing. However, it is often asked as to who is responsible for building and maintaining the sense of community - families, schools, society, young people themselves...who? This kind of argument is, however, an unnecessary waste of time, because the answer is simple: everyone is responsible. Parents are responsible for their own family, school staff are responsible for the groups at their school, coaches are responsible for their sports teams, and managers are responsible for their work communities. Individuals are responsible for their own groups and the purpose of society is to ensure that each individual has the necessary opportunities and resources for this.

The more good groups there are around a person, the stronger the social trust around him. If a young person's groups and levels of social trust are weak, even one group can have a significant effect. Just one group can

be the last straw that keeps the young person afloat. Similarly, one poor group can be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

Groups and social trust created in them cannot be just external objects of faith or inherent features; instead they are created by people. They are grown into and learned in everyday life. This learning is a lifelong process. The lack of sense of community and trust are also grown into and learned (Rimpelä 2013). This is why supporting groups of young people and their social skills is one the most important and profitable investments that can be made in Finland in the 2010s.

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Petra Pohjonen

## Common sense and open discussion – Everyone can do substance education

A faster and smoother flow of information sometimes seems confusing for educators. As young people have access to an endless amount of international research, articles, case studies, and discussions concerning substances, the arguments traditionally used in substance awareness education, such as its legality or premature death, may seem quite unconvincing. Substance-related discussions can seem intimidating for educators if the target group consists of well-prepared young people ready to use their vast background information for vitiating the educator's message. Not all the scientific and not-so-scientific sources of information presented by young people can be checked quickly, not to mention evaluated in terms of their reliability.

Avoiding unpleasant topics can easily result in the search for compensatory solutions. This can mean inviting an external expert to participate, replacing a discussion about substances with a film discussing the theme, ordering a substance training course arranged by a third party, or offloading the whole entity onto a student or trainee. All of these methods can be good – when properly implemented – and a fairly good addition to everyday substance education. As independent entities they are not, however, sufficient or successful methods.

For example, in the studies conducted by Music Against Drugs ry and Eccu Research (2011), it was clear that children and young people would rather discuss substances with adults who are part of their everyday life. These people could be teachers and parents, for example. The most successful results can be reached with long-term substance education provided as part of everyday life by the parent. The profound familiarity with the target group, the confidential relationship, the possibility to return to the subject later, and sensitivity to react to everyday situations as the topics

come up cannot be replaced, even by the highest-quality substance education offered by a third party.

## **Volunteers as providers of substance education**

YAD Youth Against Drugs ry is an organisation operating in the field of drug use prevention, whose operations mainly consist of young people working with other young people – it is voluntary work conducted by means of peer education. In practice, this means that the people providing substance education often lack actual professional education, but also the training preparing them for work with young people and the experience and authority brought about with age. Instead, all volunteers of YAD ry have undergone training provided by the organisation, tailored to the voluntary operations they have chosen.

There are two types of training courses available for those who want to work in substance education with young people: the work conducted at information desks in the form of fairly short substance-related discussions offered at events and music festivals targeted at young people and young adults, and substance education work conducted with groups of young people. In the information desk work, the operations always start from the initiative and interest of the young people visiting the event or festival, and the target group is varied in age, home background, home municipality, and attitudes towards substances. Discussions are dynamic and they are always conducted on the young person's terms. Discussions taking place at events are usually related to attitudes towards substances or opinions, but factual information is also discussed. Substance education in groups is often much more carefully targeted, there is more time and more peaceful premises available, which enables the use of several different tools and methods. However, the basic idea is the same in both types: lively two-way discussion with young people about substances that encourages them to think about the matter.

Since the time reserved for education is limited and there are numerous things to discuss, it has become necessary in the organisation to seriously consider which issues are crucial for the quality of substance educa-

tion. Should the emphasis be on learning subject matter related to different drugs and their adverse effects, sharing emotionally appealing stories about addiction, or giving a PowerPoint presentation on substances prepared in advance? The answer to this question was sought from the issue that the operation aims to influence – young people's experiments with substances. Young people do not usually try or decide not to try a specific substance on the basis of its assumed effects, especially its adverse effects. Experiments with substances are part of a wider social and cultural ritual. Young people's choices concerning substances can be compared to consumption choices; a specific substance offers the opportunity to express belonging to a certain group or subculture. This issue could be simplified as alcohol being a part of a kind of rite of growing up, smoking pot can be connected to an attitude to life, and certain subcultures may favour various party drugs, such as ecstasy and designer drugs simulating its effects. Some assumptions concerning drugs are culturally shared as well; both young people and adults say that they use alcohol to relax, forget about the stressful everyday life and have fun together. A sense of belonging does not always lead to using or even trying substances, it can simply be a question of sympathising.

Antti Maunu (2012) has studied young people's interpretations of their own alcohol use and that of their peers. He divides the alcohol culture of young people into various groups according to social class. However, all classes share the social aspect of drinking and the related rituals of spending time together that enables the group members to separate themselves from other groups and to connect to the group's other members (ibid. 98-99). Decisions young people make on substances are thus connected to their needs: the need for the sense of belonging, the need to express oneself, and various functional needs, such as relaxing. It is thus important that the substance education offered by volunteers concentrates on making these needs visible, recognising them, and offering alternative means for satisfying them.

This was also taken as a clear guideline in planning the training of the volunteers. The training naturally covers the basic information about drugs, but instead of offering detailed information on each drug, the fo-

cus lies on how we can create a good substance dialogue that encourages young people to think about their own views, how we can make young people observe and question their thinking, and operational models related to the culture and their own operations usually considered as self-evident, and how we can offer young people experiences and a sense of belonging without the use of substances. At YAD ry, the sense of belonging and experiences have been sought by arranging excursions, common activities, and participating in training events. Experiences always exist on the emotional level and they do not always have to mean extreme sports or some other activities that require long-term planning. Experiences of doing things together can also be obtained otherwise, such as baking together.

## **Discussion instead of arm-twisting**

The best way of encouraging young people to think independently is open discussion that offers them the possibility to disagree with the educator holding the discussion. Respectful, two-way dialogue is also a good way to practice argumentation concerning substances. According to studies made in substance abuse prevention, from the viewpoint of preventing the problem use of substances, practising social skills is more important than the traditional substance-oriented substance awareness education (Soikkeli and Warsell 2013, 38). Substance education among children has often focused on emphasising the word ‘no’, but young people and young adults do not settle for learning answers given to them by heart. They need options, reasons, and several differing points of view in order to form their own opinions. However, this does not mean that adults cannot express their own opinions and the reasons for them clearly as a part of the discussion. Sometimes it is necessary to arrange some kind of exercise together with the young people or utilise some other activating task in order to encourage discussion and ensure a natural dialogue and a good atmosphere for the discussion. However, methods, such as various practices with cards, games, tasks or drama, are only tools that help to prepare young people for the discussion.

The presumption that discussions about substances are difficult can be forgotten when substances are initially put to one side at first and the discussion is started with young people like any other discussion. Educators do not have to be experts in everything and they do not have to have personal experience in everything. These are the factors, however, which are often considered as prerequisites for a successful discussion about substances. Inexperience is considered a disadvantage and on the other hand those who have experience in substances see themselves as hypocrites. In addition, delimiting the personal and public area is considered challenging. For some reason, the same theme is not present in sex education, for example. Educators can talk about sexual minorities, safe sex, and sexually transmitted diseases with young people without feeling the necessity to bring up their own personal experiences. A sexual educator is not also assumed to have personal experience in all forms of sexuality. Would it be possible to apply this operational model to substance education?

Emotionally appealing horror stories and tragic life stories are considered to be the most efficient methods of substance education. Stories causing a surge of emotions of course stick in everybody's mind, but they provide quite a narrow picture of substance use. Tragedies and horror stories are almost always related to severe cases of substance addiction, whereas substance use among young people is more often only individual events or cases of experience. Points of contact for these stories may be difficult to locate and discern. Furthermore, misleading claims made with the purpose of intimidating, e.g. 'even one time can make you an addict' can weaken the credibility of substance education when young people have their own experiences that prove the claims to be wrong. Serious substance addiction is often a result of several factors and labelling the problem as an inevitable consequence of substance use distorts the information concerning addiction and substances themselves. So-called shock treatments have also been proven inefficient in a study conducted in the field of substance abuse prevention (Soikkeli and Warsell 2013, 41).

## Media as a builder of reality – the significance of media literacy

Discussions about substances can only be discussions about attitudes or swapping opinions, but at times facts and research information are also needed. In these situations, information retrieval skills and media literacy are often more important than information learned by heart. Evaluating the reliability of information can be practised together with young people by reading news stories about substances, for example. Which source is the data based on? And what is not mentioned? If possible, the original source of information should be used instead of reading only shocking summaries presented in the tabloid press. The reliability of substance-related sites may be difficult to evaluate simply on the basis of the look of the site. Sites that look impressive may not contain much factual information, whereas sites that look less professional can include good research summaries, for example. Thus the sites should be evaluated critically; who created the site and who finances it? When was the site last updated? Are there links to the original research?

One way of familiarising oneself with substance cultures and especially the cultures using substances is reading and following the discussion forums or blogs of substance users. When reading user experiences, one must remember that a subjective experience of one person or a few people cannot be generalised to apply to the masses, but it is a great addition to research information. For example the ‘Sauna’ discussion forum on the ‘Päihdelinkki’ site, hosted by the A-Clinic Foundation, offers the opportunity to familiarise oneself with the thoughts of drug users as they swap opinions, help each other, and talk about risks and their everyday life. These kinds of forums also provide a nice change for the stereotype of the drug user presented in the media and the entertainment industry. There are people from all occupational groups, who dress differently and who have different family backgrounds and different ideologies.

Media literacy is important, since the media wields power. The Ministry of the Interior conducted a survey in 2012 concerning fears the Finns have. The survey was based on a questionnaire sent by e-mail and was an-

swered by over 1,200 Finns of different ages, stating what their greatest fears were. In all age groups, the exclusion of young people was seen as a serious threat. Exclusion and its prevention have been strongly represented in politics and the media in the last few decades. The meaning of the term is still not clear to all, but the fact that this is a very serious issue is obvious to everyone. According to the National Research Institute of Legal Policy, the fear of violence is directly connected to the number of articles on violent crimes. The fear of violence also increases when the number of violent crimes decreases if the number of news of violent crimes stays high (Smole and Kemppe 2003, 225-226). In YAD ry's drug surveys of the Dancewise project (2009-2012), drugs such as crack and heroin were often listed as the most harmful drugs, although they represent only a marginal share of drugs used in Finland, especially in recent years. However, these drugs are highly popular in the products of the American entertainment industry as the drugs used by members of the worst-off social groups. A large number of sometimes shocking news articles and the entertainment industry can thus bring up threats that are not really present in everyday life in Finland. Instead, although tobacco and alcohol cause serious problems, they are seen as everyday products. The extremely high mortality rate and various accidents related to them hit the news only infrequently and they are certainly not seen as threats.

## Conclusion

Implementing high quality substance education does not always require vast substance-specific expertise or any other special expertise. Basically all education work has the same starting point as the peer awareness education offered by trained volunteers: the courage to state one's own opinions and interest in discussing the views of others. Discussion about substances does not seek to identify winners and losers - the goal is to swap opinions and refresh preconceptions and attitudes about substances. The person discussing substances with young people does not have to know everything, but information retrieval skills and media literacy can be combined as a part of the substance education entity. Whereas the parent of a



young person does not have the information the professionals have, he has other significant advantages for implementing substance education work. Knowing the life situation and background of the young person receiving the substance education enables efficient targeting of the work and meeting the genuine need. This has been seen as a key factor for the success of substance work in research in substance abuse prevention (e.g. Soikkeli and Warsell 2013, 38). Parents have the possibility to participate in a discussion about substances in everyday situations, as topics concerning substances come up. They are also available when a young person wants to discuss the topic later after giving it some thought.

Discussions about substances and other substance abuse prevention should be started with open minds. Young people themselves are the best experts of their own life situation, their own attitudes, and substance use among their friends, for example. By listening to the young people, adults gain an opportunity to learn new things, update their own information, and find new perspectives on various subjects. Adults do not have to agree with everything, but they must have the courage to adhere to their opinions when there are good reasons for it. Similarly, assessments of the young people themselves of their own life situation and their choices are always subjective, based on their life experience and situation. One way of introducing new approaches to the discussion is to say how the situation seems from outside, from an adult's perspective.

Open discussion with young people does not mean sharing everything and approving everything. Employees and volunteers are entitled and obliged to guard their privacy and they don't have to divulge their own substance use such issues that they don't feel comfortable sharing with young people or customers. Similarly, adults can be told things during discussions about substances that require further investigation, such as issues related to child protection matters. Adults should avoid giving young people promises to keep things confidential, because these promises cannot always be kept.

Volunteers working for YAD ry often consult the employees of the organisation and more experienced volunteers as and when they encounter difficulties or difficult situations. This is naturally the case for other people

working with young people. Often the best ideas are born when issues are discussed together with others. The goals should also be set realistically. A good discussion provokes new ideas and encourages young people to participate and express their own opinions. An individual discussion about substances or any other measure of substance abuse prevention does not aim to achieve strict temperance or some other form of complete change among young people. Successes and good practices should be conveyed in work communities, networks and everyday communication. Thoughts and ideas that may seem small, ideas created during discussions and other everyday insights are valuable for others as well.

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Hanna Hänninen

## Substance abuse prevention through supporting parenthood

Substance abuse prevention is defined as action aimed at promoting health, safety, and well-being. In many municipalities in Finland, substance abuse prevention is targeted primarily at young people, whose well-being is the target of the work. The focus has been on improving young people's understanding of the risks related to substance use and on strengthening the protective factors. The purpose has been to promote the participation of young people, to strengthen their own communities, and to genuinely listen to young people. These methods of social reinforcement have been used in substance abuse prevention with young people for a long time. The work has concentrated on young people by considering their perspective (Pylkkänen et al. 2009, 3).

At the Nuorten palvelupiste Nuppi (a service point for young people) operating in Riihimäki, the target group for the preventive work has been extended during the past year. At Nuppi, young people have always been the starting point of the work, and most services have been targeted at them. Nuppi employs a service instructor, a preventive substance worker, a health nurse, and a psychiatric nurse. Youth as a phase of life, considering its special features and its individuality, have been the core of the expertise of Nuppi. When working with young people, the worries of parents and support needs related to parenthood have been strongly present. During the ten years Nuppi has been operational, numerous parents have shared their views on the lives of young people. Often parents have contacted Nuppi because they have been worried about the situation of their own children and have wanted support for their actions as parents. They have been unsure how they should act in various situations or how they should react to the challenging behaviour of their children. Often parents

have been worried about the sufficiency of their resources as parents, especially in situations where the young person has had difficulties experiencing puberty or challenged his parents with his actions.

Parents' fear of reaching the limit of their resources is understandable. Puberty is the most significant phase of development and change for a young person after the baby years. Physically, children become adults in a period of 3-4 years, and this period is also the time of huge psychological development and change. Puberty is strongly visible in the body, behaviour, thinking and nearly always also in the parents and the rest of the family related to the young person. A young person with all these changes and his needs for independence often challenges his parents in order to evaluate their own modes of operation and abilities as parents. Parents have to think how they can support the budding independence of their child and at the same time set safe limits for them. The conflict between letting go and holding on sets a great challenge for parents. Along with the changes taking place during puberty, the young person gradually creates an independent and adult identity that also includes adopting a socially responsible behaviour. Becoming an adult is a result of many experiences and contemplation, and it does not happen overnight. Even if parents would want to, they cannot pass on all their experiences and knowledge in a way that the child or young person would subsequently live wisely ever after (Cacciatore 2009, 8-13).

## **Parental group – from an idea to reality**

Nuppi wanted to find concrete ways to meet the needs and wishes of the parents. They already had a lot of experience in encountering young people and listening to them, but the views of the parents had remained quite unclear. Family meetings had been arranged at Nuppi from the start, but now the focus of the preventive work shifted to those parents who did not have access to any other services that support parenthood. These parents and families were not child protection customers and the family counselling centre was not able to offer them the services they required. Peer group activities for parents were planned at Nuppi back in spring 2012,

but those plans never became reality. At the time, there was no experience of activities targeted at the parents of adolescents, but the need had come up with several cooperation parties. Child protection authorities, educational authorities and student welfare services had all identified the need to support parents in their educational duties – the requirement set for these authorities in the legislation as well. Strengthening the role of the parents in order to safeguard the healthy growth, development, and well-being of young people was considered an important part of the preventive work.

My own studies at Diaconia University of Applied Sciences in the degree programme in Social Services stepped up the development of services targeted at parents. My diploma work was titled ‘Adolescence turns things upside down – resources of parenthood and peer support’ (Hänninen 2012). The purpose of the study was to determine what kinds of challenges parents face in their everyday life with their adolescent child, and how they could be supported as efficiently as possible. The second viewpoint of the study was peer support and its significance for parents. Results compiled from the interviews of the parents supported the idea of founding a parental group. The study indicated that many parents wished to benefit from parenthood support from the education professionals and from other parents. Adolescence was seen to have a strong effect on the whole family, and parents felt that they were left alone with their conflicting emotions related to parenthood. They wanted to have an opportunity to share their experiences and get support for their choices from other parents in similar situations, as they had no alternative ways to discuss these issues with other parents (Hänninen 2013).

After these encouraging results, a preliminary plan and framework was created at Nuppi for the parental group and a group of professionals of the youth sector worked together to implement the plan. The group consisted of a psychologist, a social worker, a youth worker, a psychotherapist, and one peer parent who had experience of difficult times with several young people. The content of the parental group was constructed in a way that each session started with a 45-minute introduction held by a professional. After a coffee break, parents were encouraged to share their experiences

with other parents, with the emphasis on peer support. The topics of the sessions included adolescence as a phase of development; risk behaviour of adolescents related to substances, crimes, and mental health, for example; interaction within families; services targeted at young people; and parenting resources. Two employees from Nuppi acted as group leaders and they were accompanied by one expert at a time.

The group was advertised to all parents of young people via schools, family counselling centres, child protection, health care, and student welfare services. The group attracted interest of the local media and an article was published concerning the operation of the group. The group was fully booked within a couple of weeks and there was not enough capacity for everyone interested. The parental group met five times for a two-hour session and all 15 parents of the group participated in all sessions. Feedback received from the parents was very encouraging and positive. Parents felt that they had gained a lot of additional information from the group and a better understanding of the behaviour of their own children. Many parents felt that they had also received concrete and practical tips for everyday life with young people. The experiences of peer support gained in the discussions were found to be beneficial and empowering, and parents expressed a desire for more time and opportunities for this kind of peer support in the future.

The parental group was, in many respects, a successful experiment where an idea born from a parental need was implemented in multidisciplinary cooperation at low cost. The popularity of the group among parents was a surprise to many, but it naturally also set high expectations for the group. The heterogeneous composition of the parental group also set its own challenges in terms of its implementation. Some parents in the group wanted to predict the coming adolescence of their child and obtain necessary information related to adolescence. On the other hand, there were also parents from families that were already receiving support from child protection workers or other measures. The objective of the group was to support parenthood by providing information and by strengthening peer support between parents. On the basis of the feedback received

from parents, we can consider our operation successful. It was hoped that the parental group operations would continue.

## **What makes the work with the parental group relevant to substance abuse prevention?**

In substance abuse prevention, the attitudes of young people, their life situation and behaviour are evaluated from the perspective of a number of factors protecting people from substance use and the risk factors exposing them to substance use. Many of the protective factors are directly or indirectly connected to the family, parents, development or living environment via which a young person forms the basis of his identity. Other factors protecting a young person from substance use are e.g. confidential social relationships in his close community, good levels of self-respect, and a responsible attitude towards substance use among the young person's close community (Pylkkänen et al. 2009, 14–15). Strengthening family relationships and parenthood means strengthening these protective factors and highlighting them; they thus form a natural target for substance abuse prevention. One important protective factor for the well-being of young people is adequate self-respect. It protects young people from substance use and problems related to mental health. Parents are in a key position in building self-respect. What kinds of strengths parents see in their adolescent child, how they encourage him, and how positively they see his future all play a central role in strengthening his self-respect. This helps the young person in other social relationships as well, and influences his substance-related choices when under social pressure as well.

People in the parental group stated that they were unaware of many phenomena related to the world of the adolescents. They felt that they needed up-to-date and concrete information on substances and issues related to mental health. They felt that they also needed information in order to be able to discuss substances and the choices related to them with their adolescent children. Parents found discussing cannabis use particularly difficult, due to their own attitudes and lack of information on the subject. In addition to facts, parents need support for their own social



skills. In order to be able to raise socially capable children, adults must be able to develop their own social skills as well, especially when discussing things with their adolescent children. In the group, the parents had the opportunity to try out how an adolescent can be given feedback in a positive way in a challenging situation in practice. The purpose of these practices was to facilitate the forming of a confidential relationship between the adolescent and his parents and to improve communication, especially when the communication had broken down.

Preventive work can also be implemented by encouraging parents to seek help at the earliest possible stage. This helps to prevent the problems from piling up and the situation from reaching a deadlock. In the parental group, the parents were offered information on the various available forms of support. For example, in terms of child protection, parents still have attitudes that prevent them from seeking help that would facilitate early intervention. For parents of adolescent children in particular, resorting to child protection services is often seen as failure as a parent, which is why being a customer of child protection services is still considered a taboo and is connected to feelings of shame. In the parental group, there was also a lot of discussion concerning the issues that can be connected to normal adolescence and what kind of issues should be taken seriously. When evaluating their own worries, many parents felt that the peer support made them feel normal, i.e. their worries were considered from the right perspective, even though strong feelings are always involved. Parents felt relieved to hear that other families were having similar problems.

## **Parents make valuable substance abuse prevention interventions**

In his report on the drinking cultures of young people, Antti Maunu (2012, 162–164) emphasises that substance abuse prevention must concentrate on influencing the reasons why young people drink instead of the symptoms caused by drinking. According to Maunu, there is always a social aspect connected to drinking among young people, as they are attempting to brighten up their everyday lives and overcome their feelings

of isolation by participating in celebrations that connect young people. Maunu feels that it is important to determine how everyday life could offer experiences that promote a sense of belonging without the use of alcohol. Substance abuse prevention thus refers to having an influence in everyday life and strengthening the feeling of belonging to a group – this is the task of all educators, both parents and professionals. Educators should be able to turn the social habits and ideals that strengthen the sense of belonging into common everyday routines that help young people to deal with feelings of isolation.

Substance abuse prevention cannot thus be targeted only at young people – it means educating the educators as well (Maunu 2012, 162–164). There is a substance abuse prevention educator in every parent with huge opportunities to have an influence. Parents are a part of the everyday lives of young people and they create a safe framework for it. A young person is primarily a member of his close community and the family community creates the basis for his values and attitudes. The negative attitudes of parents and the close community act as protective factors for the adolescent in the future and he can lean on them when making his own choices in the future. Each family's ways of using alcohol mould the substance culture of the whole society and this is why parents should be seen as important targets of preventive work in terms of affecting attitudes.

Maunu (2012) defines four different roles for substance educators via which preventive work is implemented in the society: educator, interpreter, lecturer, and fighter. An employee working in substance abuse prevention is primarily an educator who believes in the power of social action, creating a sense of belonging and engagement in positive everyday routines. Parents operate in this role in their everyday lives by providing regularity in the life of their adolescent child. Home is the place for eating, hobbies, talking, and spending leisure time together. Employees working in substance abuse prevention also act as interpreters who are trying to find a common language and, as a result, understanding. The common language of young people and adults creates a feeling of a shared, common world and society. At home, parents can listen to their adolescent child and talk with him and be genuinely interested in his own world and eve-

ryday phenomena. In discussions related to substances, a common understanding does not require simply accepting the behaviour of the adolescent child. Instead, it means genuinely listening to his thoughts. In practice, this can mean an adult listening to the adolescent child's opinions and thoughts and presenting his own views only when it is absolutely necessary.

The role of lecturer in preventive work does not mean simply speaking about issues considered positive from an adult's point of view. In order to get their message across, adults need to try to understand which issues the adolescent sees as important and worth achieving, and which issues he might look to strengthen through the use of substances. The perception of a positive life of an adolescent might not be the same as that of an adult (Maunu 2012, 162–164). At home, parents should listen to the goals and hopes the adolescent has at that time and encourage him to achieve them. As problems arise in the everyday life of the adolescent, parents often get worried and jump to conclusions, failing to see the adolescent's own attempts to solve the problems in small steps. Phrases like 'If you keep acting like that you will never amount to anything' say to an adolescent that he looks incompetent to the adult and is incapable of doing anything. Without positive feedback and encouragement, a lecturing adult can easily make an adolescent feel even worse.

The methods of political and social influencing should also be used in substance abuse prevention, which require the role and attitude of a fighter. Workers operating in substance abuse prevention also need to interpret the social and emotional nature of drinking for decision-makers and politically influential people. Substance-related problems cannot only be solved by correcting an individual – changes are required to society and the community around him. A worker operating in substance abuse prevention should create social responsibility and each adult should do his own share (Maunu 2012, 162–164). Parents of adolescent children can fight the same battle for the common responsibility of adults in their own networks. Every adult is entitled to step in and take care of the young people they encounter in their life. It still takes a village to raise a child – if

there are sane and brave adults in the village to take care of the children and young people.

The purpose of substance abuse prevention is to promote well-being – a common resource in our society. Investing in the well-being of individuals always increases social capital as well. Preventive work is thus, above all, work for well-being that aims to increase physical, psychological and social well-being. For the effectiveness of substance abuse prevention, the essential thing is to understand the target group of the preventive work and to select the most suitable methods for it. Work conducted with parents differs in its methods from preventive work conducted among young people, but according to our experiences, it is worthwhile and rewarding. As yet, there are not many forms of preventive work targeted at parents of adolescents, but there is a clear demand and need for it. We as the actors of preventive work know for sure that preventive work is more cost-effective and productive than corrective work. With preventive work targeted at parents, we can influence the well-being of both the adolescent children and their families, which means at least doubling the effectiveness of preventive work.

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