

Youth-centred Cannabis Education & Harm Prevention: Lessons from TRACE research

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Study Team

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a place of mind

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Outline

- Lessons from B.C.'s TRACE research program
- The CYCLES classroom resources
- Developing prevention and education in the new context of legalization

**Unlearn everything you think you know
about youth drug prevention**

The Context in Canada

- Cannabis policies have been based on politics and values rather than evidence from public health.
- The evidence on health risks and benefits is still developing.
- Many approaches to youth prevention and education are archaic and ineffective.
- There is a need for a comprehensive and coordinated public health approach to regulating cannabis use.

A Public Health Approach

“This approach to substances recognizes that people use substances for anticipated beneficial effects and is attentive to the potential harms of the substances and the unintended effects of control policies...it seeks to ensure that harms associated with control interventions are not out of proportion to the benefit to harm ratios of the substances themselves.”

<http://drugpolicy.ca/the-drug-problem/glossary/>

Canadian Drug Policy Coalition



TRACE Project

An ethnographic study exploring frequent cannabis use among youth ages 13-19 in three communities in British Columbia.

2006-10: Primary data collection

2011-16: Knowledge translation projects



Purpose

- To explore the *culture and context* of teens' frequent cannabis use
- To engage youth in developing credible and appropriate harm prevention messages

What We Learned

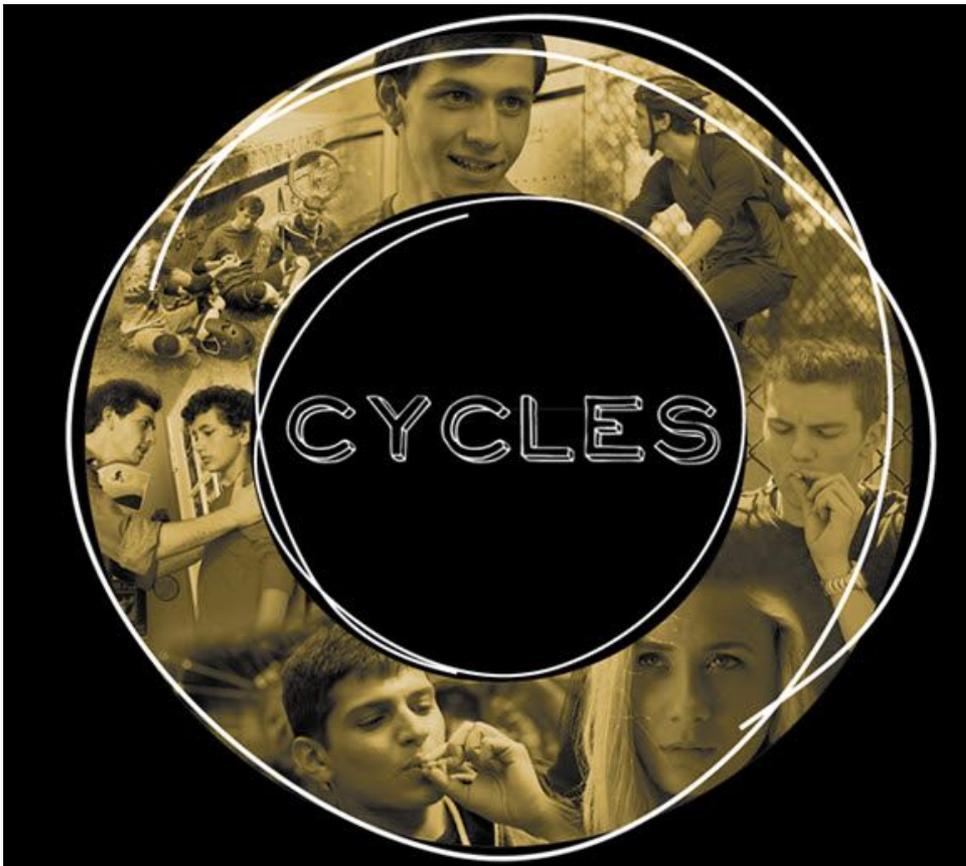
- There is a spectrum of use by youth: from social, to 'relief-oriented,' to problematic.
- Youth were skeptical of 'biased' or heavy-handed messaging.
- Stigmatizing youth who use cannabis as 'unhealthy' or 'addicts' is not productive.
- Youth are actively engaged in their own harm prevention strategies (two examples).

Implications for Education

1. Scare tactics just don't work.
2. Teachers and parents were not well-equipped.
3. Youth are doing their own research.
4. Better information doesn't change behaviour.
5. Programs should be evidence-informed and youth inclusive.

Consider that the best drug prevention might not even be about drugs at all.

The Cycles Resource



If I were Olin, what would I do now?

- a) Continue to smoke the joint while Lisa stays in the car.
- b) Apologize and put the joint out immediately.
- c) Ask Lisa why she's not into smoking marijuana.
- d) Suggest that she leave the car, smoke my joint, and then go back to the party.
- e) Other _____



http://youtu.be/RjuY_YVfnal

Prevention in a New Context

- LISTEN TO YOUTH perspectives.
- Context is everything!
- Talking about drug use does not cause drug use.
- Don't panic about increased prevalence of use.
- Embrace harm reduction to protect youth.
- Challenge your assumptions and stigmas.

Let's not waste this policy window and the huge opportunity we have to do something new and different in youth drug prevention and education.

New Research

- **TRACE IV:** A qualitative interview study with parents focused on their experiences of their children's use, with the goal of developing a resource to facilitate constructive dialogue.
- **TRACE V:** An study exploring the parent-youth 'cannabis conversation' across three contexts:
 - Family mental illness
 - Social vulnerability
 - Parental cannabis use

Study Publications

Johnson JL, Moffat B, Bottorff JL, Shoveller J, Fischer B, Haines R (2008). **Marking the place for marijuana use at a Canadian high school.** *Journal of Youth Studies*, 11(1):47-64.

Moffat, B, Johnson, JL, Shoveller J (2009). **A gateway to nature: Teenagers' narratives on smoking marijuana outdoors.** *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 29 (1):86-94.

Bottorff JL, Johnson JL, Moffat B, & Mulvogue T (2009) **Relief-oriented use of marijuana by teens.** *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy*, 4, 7.

Haines RJ, Johnson JL, Carter CI, & Arora K (2009). **“I couldn't say, I'm not a girl”-Adolescents talk about gender and marijuana use.** *Social Science & Medicine*, 68(11): 2029-2036.

Moffat B, Jenkins E, & Johnson JL (2013). **Weeding out the information: An ethnographic approach to exploring how young people make sense of the evidence on cannabis.** *Harm Reduction Journal*, 10(1): 34. [OPEN ACCESS <http://www.harmreductionjournal.com/content/10/1/34>]

Haines-Saah, R., Moffat, B., Jenkins, E., Johnson, J. (2014) **The influences of health beliefs and identity on adolescent marijuana and tobacco co-use.** *Qualitative Health Research (Qualitative Health Research* 24(7):946-956.

CYCLES RESOURCES ONLINE:

<http://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/carbc/publications/helping-schools/cycles/index.php>