

Three soccer balls, two netballs and no health education. Can healthy outcomes be achieved? A case study of one teacher's efforts to promote healthy lifestyles in a SE Asian high school.

Ross Williams

*Lecturer Health and Physical Education
Murdoch University
School of Education
South Street
Murdoch, Western Australia 6150
Telephone: 9360 7460
Fax: 9360 6280
e-mail: williams@murdoch.edu.au*

Abstract

So you think you have faced some challenges in your teaching of Physical and Health Education? Imagine yourself teaching in a foreign country, where English is a second language, Physical Education classes fight for use of limited sports equipment and Health Education classes don't exist!

This paper describes how the implementation of a number of cross-curricular strategies in a high school, resulted in increased participation in physical activities, generated better knowledge of dietary habits and led to a more productive classroom environment.

Table of Contents

Title	1
Abstract	2
Table of Contents	3
Introduction	4
The Context for Education in Negara Brunei Darussalam	4
The Nature of the School Curriculum in Brunei	4
School Structure	6
The Place of Health and Physical Education	7
Health Issues	7
Taking Action	8
Results	11
Conclusion	11
References	13

Introduction

This paper is an account of the systemic, cultural and pedagogical challenges that faced a teacher who wished to improve health outcomes among high school students in South East Asia.

It commences by outlining the broad context for education in the county followed by an account of the teacher's efforts (given minimal fiscal, time and human resources), to implement of a number of cross-curricular strategies aimed at enhancing students' health outcomes. These strategies aimed at;

- *increasing participation in physical activities*
- *generating better knowledge of healthy lifestyles*
- *using pedagogy that would develop good rapport in the classroom.*

The Context for Education in Negara Brunei Darussalam

It is well known in the South East Asian region that Brunei Darussalam has enjoyed very favourable economic growth over the past couple of decades. It has one of the highest per capita incomes (\$20,400 US based on G.N.P. figures) in the region, similar to many of the worlds more industrialised countries and an annual growth of 1% per annum of its G.D.P. (Asiaweek, August 1999). The citizens of Brunei Darussalam enjoy a good standard of living and have adequate social provision including free education and health services, no income tax and a range of other benefits.

A major reason for the success of the economy is due the foreign income generated from export of its petroleum products - oil and gas which account for around 40% of the country's G.D.P. (1999).

Given the inevitable the finite nature of its natural resources, and with a view to the future development of the country, the Government of Brunei Darussalam has made efforts to improve its education system in order to supply the 'human capital' required to support planned economic developments (Tilak, 1993: Psacharopoulos, 1994: Morris, 1996). Central to the successful development of human capital as a resource is an effective education system endowed with a purposeful curriculum.

The Nature of the School Curriculum in Brunei

The education system in Negara Brunei Darussalam is highly centralised, utilising a centre-periphery approach in its administration, decision-making and funding functions. Under the direction of the Ministry of Education, schools operate in similar ways and their structure and function is replicated throughout the country. With the exception of a

few private 'mission schools' and a handful of International Schools, the curriculum is rigid and largely academic with few academic options available to the students.

A common feature in the Brunei school curriculum provision is the promotion of social cohesion and national development goals. These features support the Government's aim to create a homogeneous, competitive and diligent society that possesses a clear and unambiguous sense of national goals and character. In Brunei Darussalam, communal and social values and needs have priority over the 'western' type values that emphasise individual needs or aspirations (Pinar 1989: Shaker and Kridel 1989).

In Bruneian schools, academic knowledge and skills are made explicit in the formal curriculum and great value is placed on the inculcation of values and attitudes, the preservation of traditions, beliefs, goals and aspirations held by Bruneian society. Schools place equal importance on:

1. Developing 'all round skills' i.e. *physical, mental and spiritual*.
2. Inculcating *moral and spiritual values* and the development of mutually agreed values such as *citizenship, loyalty to the monarchy*.

In theory the various subjects taught in the primary and high school are all linked and sequential in nature. The reality is different. Often the curriculum is dealt with in a series of unrelated packages, separated by their own periods. The opportunities for reinforcing one strand of learning and connecting it with others are diminished particularly in cases where subject specialists exist.

The school curriculum in Brunei tends to be delivered in a didactic fashion. Teachers tend to teach to the narrowly prescribed syllabus and rely on drill and memorisation, as key strategies (Cheong & Nuttman, 1995).

Negara Brunei Darussalam's Seventh National Plan alluded to qualitative type problems within the education system including the high failure rates, poor motivation of pupils and the mismatch of school graduates to demands of the labour market. Csapo and Khalid (1996, pg. 111), attributed qualitative problems within the system as being linked to:

1. Teachers having minimal qualifications.
2. Outmoded teaching practices.
3. Little opportunity for professional development and professional development unrelated to teacher needs.
4. Overloaded curriculum - students have a very demanding day, which requires them to attend school in the morning to study their academic subjects, followed by Ugama school (religious school) in the afternoon.

5. Exam orientated instruction - Teachers place a premium on teaching toward exams and use methods that allow for efficient covering the syllabus. Texts are largely determined by syllabuses that rarely make allowances for differences between pupils.
6. Little motivation to learn due to rigid academic structures.
7. Limited teaching resources available.

School Structure

The Ministry of Education coordinates the implementation of educational programs, projects and activities for a total of 32,316 students in 123 primary schools, 26 secondary schools and 70 non-government schools. Students in Brunei start school at the age of five in preschool and then progress through primary school from darjah (year) one until the end of darjah six. If they pass their final year exams, they graduate to high school.

For the first three years of their schooling the curriculum is delivered through the Malay language medium. After darjah three the majority of subjects are taught through the English language medium. Students are required to 'pass' each year of study before being promoted to the next year however repetition rates are high. In 1986, 800 children above the age of 14 years, were still in primary schools. In high schools 34% of the form 5, students were over 18 years Csapo and Khalid (1996, pg. 111).

Students sit for a major exam in form three of high school and depending on their results, have a number of options:

1. Pursue two to three years of upper secondary education leading to the Brunei Cambridge General Certificate of Education (GCE 'O' Level) examination or the GCE 'N' level examination.
2. Pursue craft and basic technical level courses at technical or vocational institutions or enter the employment market.
3. Progress onto form four then form five when they sit their 'O' level exams. A small percentage of students continue onto form 6 where they study for their 'A' level exams in preparation for further study in tertiary institutions.

Primary and high schools operate 5 days a week Monday to Thursday and then again on Saturday with Friday and Sunday being holidays. Most schools operate on two shifts a day either: 7.30am to 12.30pm or 1pm to 4pm. Teachers either work a morning or afternoon shift.

In one half of the day schools are used for academic purposes (Ministry of Education) and in the other half they become a religious schools (the Department of Religious Affairs).

The learning areas are similar in both in high and in primary schools comprising core learning areas: Maths, Science, English, Malay, Geography and History which are all allocated 2 1/2 hours a week.

Islamic Religious Studies, Physical Education, Home Economics, Art and Malay Islamic Monarchy (MIB) comprise the rest of the timetable and are allocated 1 hour a week.

The Place of Health and Physical Education

Physical education in primary schools is generally timetabled on Saturday mornings. The program consists of passive stretching and is usually conducted 'en mass' in undercover areas or outside classrooms. Some schools supplement this program with participation in interschool sport.

At the high school level, girls and boys are timetabled for physical education separately. When the boys do physical education the girls study home economics and when the girls do physical education the boys do art or in some cases woodwork.

Generally facilities are poor. Few schools have purpose built gymnasiums and playing fields are often of poor quality. Sports equipment is limited and students often bring equipment from home to supplement the limited supply of equipment available in the school.

Choices within the physical education programs are limited to soccer and badminton for the boys and netball and badminton for the girls. Very few other sports are taught.

Health education in both the primary and high schools is subsumed under the science program and focuses on basic anatomy only. Sexuality, drug and nutrition education are largely absent.

Health Issues

Brunei's participation in the global economy has impacted the social fabric of its society. The new world economy and its associated influences i.e. the world wide web, satellite, television etc have infiltrated traditional Bruneian society and have challenged its traditional orthodoxy and basic values.

To counter the inevitable clash of values, the Bruneian government has implemented its Malay Islamic Monarchy (MIB) policy throughout schools, to ensure that local values and the inculcation of Islamic values remain important priorities throughout society.

Despite the implementation of these measures social and health problems such as drug addiction, the increase in divorce, domestic violence and rising debt appear to be on the increase (Economic Intelligence Unit, 1996, pp. 60).

The current generation of Bruneian youth, are now faced with new kinds of social and health issues including: road trauma, illicit drug use, teenage pregnancy and obesity (Suppiah, C. & Burns, R.B. 1997; Welsh 1996).

The rest of this paper will describe how one teacher took action to address some of these emerging health and social problems in the high school context.

Taking Action

The school used in this study was a Government secondary high school located in Brunei Darussalam catering for male and female students aged five ages between 12 and 21 years. The school had an enrolment of 800 students between form one and form five.

The teacher in this study worked from the notion that if some health promotion activities could be instigated within classes, then healthy behaviours could be facilitated despite the absence of a comprehensive health education program (Green, 1979; Kolbe, 1985).

The teacher in this study worked in the English learning area, not in health or physical education.

1. The Plan

Questionnaires were used to identify the key health concerns of students in the school. Issues identified included;

- poor knowledge of nutrition
- misunderstandings about sexuality issues
- low levels of physical activity
- widespread analgesic use.

2. The Action

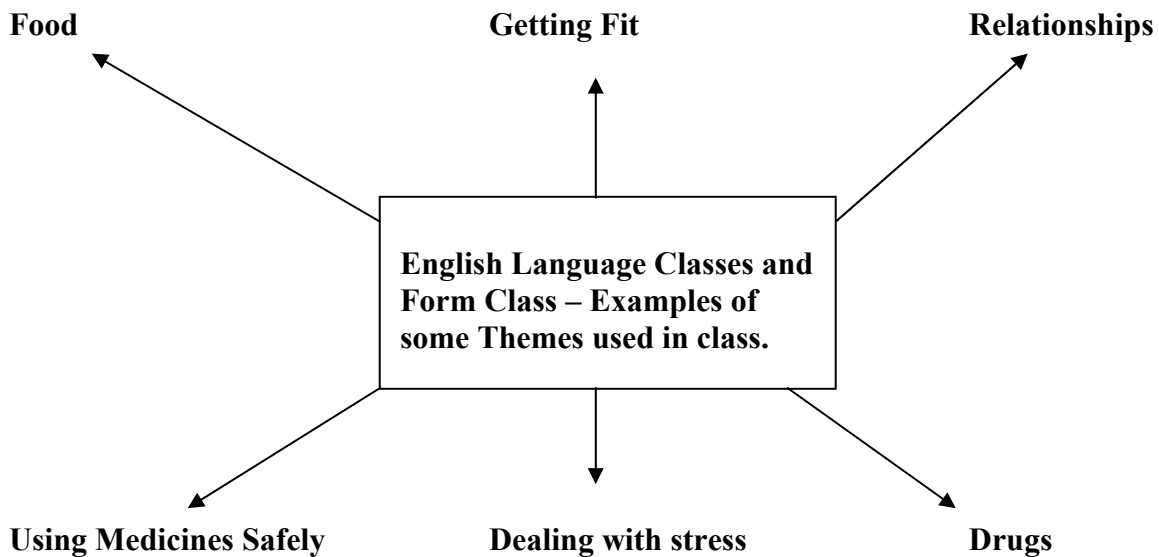
The teacher implemented a number of different actions to address these problems:

Integration of health concepts in the English learning area

Through careful planning, health concepts were integrated within English and daily form period meetings. Themes were developed and explored over the year.

The themes included:

Figure One: Healthy Themes



Strategies were designed that the developed healthy concepts within English language classes. Activities that proved successful in this respect were:

- oral reports based on research conducted in the library
- debates based on health issues
- dramatic plays about human relation issues
- selection of reading materials that reinforced healthy themes.

Setting up special healthy days - Food day.

Students were allowed to eat their lunch in the classroom. Student lunches consisted of foods high in fat and drinks with high levels of sugar. One activity that raised student awareness levels about their diet was called ‘Makan Hari’ or ‘Food Day’. Students contributed money and the teacher provided a healthy lunch. Held once a term the students turned up in large numbers to taste the food. Alternative food choices to their regular lunches were provided and the discussion about why certain foods were selected, provided excellent opportunities to talk about establishing healthy eating habits.

Another popular strategy was the ‘deconstruction of student lunch box’ activity. Students considered the contents of their lunch box and classified the food into the basic food groups.

These two complementary activities became excellent conduits for raising awareness of nutritional issues.

Self esteem building

Authentic writing tasks provided the students with the opportunity to set up ‘pen-friend’ mail links with students in Australia. This turned out to be an excellent way of developing students’ self esteem as they shared information, values and feelings with students from another country. The activity proved to be a great motivator for writing and an excellent opportunity to talk about themselves with others. Students felt very special to receive letters from overseas and to be asked their opinions, values and ideas about a range of issues.

Basic first aid courses

Part of the requirement of the English syllabus was to have students write procedural reports. The teacher used this opportunity to teach some basic first aid as follows:

- Students formed pairs.
- Each partner learnt a new first aid technique/procedure independent of the other.
- They would observe, write notes, practise the skill and then teach it to their partner.
- Students would then be encouraged to follow the report writing procedure and to document the newly learnt procedure.

Drug testing

The narcotics police would visit the school on a regular basis and test the students for illicit drug use. If students tested positive they were taken to drug rehabilitation unit and dealt with. These events were frightening for the students but they provided an excellent opportunity to stimulate discussion about drug issues.

Running extra curricular clubs

The teacher set up extra curricular activities after school in order to promote physical activity. In conjunction with the female physical education teacher, students would be invited to play a sport after school. Two conditions had to be met before they could participate. Students were required to:

1. Wear clothes appropriate for physical activity.
2. Contribute to the organization of the activity.

These two conditions were instrumental to the success of the program for a number of reasons.

First it was difficult to encourage physical activity among the female students. Dress codes during physical education lessons required them to cover their heads, legs and arms. In a country where the average daily temperature is 27 degrees C with 80% humidity - this was problematic!

The girls supported the idea of after school activities because they had the opportunity to change into some more comfortable clothes and participate in sport without the restriction of excessive clothing (because there were no change rooms in the school, they often wore their sports clothes under their uniforms).

The other advantage of having the students wear comfortable sporting attire was that they rather fancied having the boys see them in something that looked a little ‘sporty.’

The second condition ensured that the clubs would continue even if the teacher(s) weren’t present. Like the Sport Education model that has emerged in schools throughout WA, students were required to run warm-ups, bring equipment, organise tournaments, referee games and record and publicise the results of fixtures.

Upwards of 120 boys attended these sessions and some 20 girls, usually with just one or two teachers supervising. Discipline problems did not exist because for the majority of them, this was their only opportunity to actively engage in meaningful sport during their week. Little opportunity existed for active participation in sport outside the confines of the school unless the students were skilled enough or physically large enough to compete in the adult competitions organized in their Kampongs (Villages).

Results

The most notable outcome of all of these strategies was the positive relationship that developed between the teacher and the students. This positive relationship provided the leverage to raise and discuss personal and health issues in a safe classroom environment. Students were more willing to engage in discussion of health issues, and as an awareness raising exercise, the strategies appeared to work.

Whilst the measurement of health outcomes is in itself problematic, anecdotal observation, written work collected from student journals and class reports and discussion with students indicated that positive attitudinal changes in relation to health issues had occurred.

Conclusion

The reality of matching school curriculum to the needs of students is perplexing. Teachers often find themselves caught in a moralistic/educational dilemmas between ideologies arguing that they must prepare students for their entry into a globalised economy, full of cultural, business and social values many of which are often at odds with their own educational, cultural and social principles.

This paper attempted to show what can be achieved in raising student awareness of the need to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Strategies focused on integrating healthy concepts into

the English language learning area and in providing opportunities to increase physical activity through extra curricular activities.

The ultimate challenge for all educators is to produce well educated students who are able to take personal responsibility for maintaining their health. In societies where schools are unable to accomplish this, this in turn will cause a spiral of financial, social and educational decline that will undermine any government's hopes for a healthy and economically stable society.

References

Asiaweek, Vol 25 No 23, Published by Asiaweek, August 20-27, 1999.

Attwood J. & Bray M. (1989) Wealthy but small and young: Brunei Darussalam and its education system. In *Education Research and Perspectives*. Vol 16, No 1, June 1989 (pp.70-82).

Azahairani Hj. Mohd. Jamil (1986) Evaluation of science teaching in Brunei. *Brunei Association for Special Education Bulletin*, Vol 4.

Csapo, M. & Omar bin Hj Khalid. (1996) Development of special education in Brunei: The case of a developing country. *International Journal of Special Education*, 11, 2 & 3.

Dignan MB, Carr PA, (1987) *Program planning for health education and health promotion*, Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger.

Economic Intelligence Unit (1996) *Brunei country profile*. London: The Economist.

Fuller, B. (1994) Quality of Education in developing nations: Policies for improving. In T. Husen & T. N. Postelthwaite (Eds.) *The International Encyclopedia of Education* (2nd Ed.), Vol 4, Oxford: Pergamon.

Government of Brunei (1996) *Seventh National Development Plan for Negara Brunei Darussalam (1996-2000)*, Ministry of Law. Published by the Government Printing Department.

Gunn, G.C. (1993) Rentier capitalism in Negara Brunei Darussalam. In K. Hewison, R. Robison & G. Rodan (eds). *Southeast Asia in the 1990's: Authoritarianism, Democracy & Capitalism* (pp. 109-132). London: Allen & Unwin.

Haji Abd. Hakip Hj Burut (1994) *Teacher Morale in Government Secondary Schools in Negara Brunei Darussalam*. Unpublished M Ed Management Thesis.

Hanushek, E. (1995) Interpreting recent research on schooling in developing countries. *The World Bank Research Observer*, 10, (2), 227-246.

Hawe P, Degeling D, Hall J (1990) *Evaluating health promotion*. NSW. MacLennan and Petty Publishers.

Lim J.J., & Nuttman, C.J., in Bray M., (ed), 1991. *Ministries of Education in Small States*, published by Commonwealth Secretariat, London.

Minnis, J.R (1997) *Education and development in Brunei Darussalam: Challenges and priorities for the future*. A paper presented at the 4th International Conference on Development, University Kebangsaan, K.L., Malaysia,

Morris, P. (1996) Asia's four little tigers: A comparison of the role of education in their development. *Comparative Education*, 32, (1), 95-109.

Morris, P & Marsh C. (1992) Curriculum patterns and issues in East Asia: a comparative survey of seven east asian societies. In *Education Policy*, 1992, Vol 7, No 3 pp 251-266.

Nuttman C., & Cheong, D., (1995). *Education Policy: A global or local agenda? Reflections on Brunei Darussalam*. A paper presented at the SEAMCO INNOTECH Conference in Philippines.

Pinar, W.F. (1989) A reconceptualization of teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*. Vol 40(1), 9-12.

Psacharopoulos, G. (1994) Returns to investment in education: A global update. *World Development*, 22, (9), 1325-1343.

Richards, D. (1993) Flying against the wind? Culture and management in south east Asia. In P. Blunt & D, Richards (Eds.) *Readings in Management, Organisation and Culture in East and Southeast Asia* (pp. 356-371). Darwin NTU Press.

Shaker, P. & Kridel, C. (1989) The return to experience: A reconceptualist call. *Journal of Teacher Education*. 40 (1),2-8.

Suppiah, C. & Burns, R.B. (1997) Adolescent problems - A Profile of Adolescents in Brunei Darussalam. A paper delivered at NAWCAD, September,1997, University of Brunei Darussalam .

Tilak, J.B.G. (1993) Investment in education in East Asia. *ASEAN Economic Bulletin*, 9,(3), 301-322.

The Economist, 1996; *Far Eastern Review*, 1996.

The Economist (March 29th - April 4th1997), Education and the wealth of nations pp. 21.

Welsh, J (1996) Why don't they ever ask us? Perceptions of Bruneian adolescent youth toward their future. Published in the SHBIE *Studies of Education Journal*. Universiti of Brunei Darusslam.