

Expanding Young People's Horizons as Leaders of Change in their Community: How Could Critical Pedagogy Improve Australasian Transport Safety Education?

Janine Ferris

University of Waikato, New Zealand

Abstract

Transport safety education programs in Australasia continue to default to traditional pedagogical methods despite the lack of evidence of their effectiveness in improving safety learning outcomes. Top down approaches promoting a singular view of 'proper' attitudes and behaviours are didactic and position young people as needing to be controlled (Kincheloe, 2004). Embedding critical pedagogical approaches such as Knowledge Producing Schools (KPS) (Rowan & Bigum, 2010), systems and critical thinking within transport safety education programs could reposition young people to drive change in their own communities and make real-world contributions to improving safety on our roads, around trains, and near tracks.

Theoretical background

Traditional pedagogy focusses on 'knowledge giving'; little consideration is given to young people and their genuine potential to solve real-world problems. Scholars of critical pedagogy (Friere, Giroux, Kincheloe) reject these didactic approaches, with Kincheloe (2004) arguing critical pedagogy leads students to want to make a difference through their actions. When teachers facilitate student enquiry, students learn to pose problems and in turn gain the freedom "to become self-directed human beings capable of producing their own knowledge" (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 17). Rowan and Bigum (2010) expand on this idea with Bigum's KPS framework, which gives education program designers, schools and teachers the ability to create educational projects which transform the learning experience for students by asking them to produce rather than consume knowledge, and connects the learner to a real-world audience in the broader community.

Real-world application

In their transport safety education materials, the New Zealand Transport Agency's (NZTA's) transport safety 'Education Portal' (NZTA, n.d.-a) in New Zealand and the TrackSAFE Foundation's (TrackSAFE's) rail safety program 'TrackSAFE Education' (TrackSAFE, n.d.) in Australia utilise critical pedagogical approaches. They incorporate the KPS framework as well as student-driven tasks encouraging systems thinking and critical thinking to encourage students to solve transport safety problems in their own communities. This approach is not however seen consistently throughout transport safety education programs across Australasia: many are information-based, which have shown little success in achieving positive safety change (NZTA, n.d.-b).

Expanding program horizons

There is a need to shift from traditional, information-giving pedagogical methods used across transport safety education towards approaches which focus less on the power of the institution, such as schools, road or rail organisations or the police; less on the adult doing the 'teaching', such as the Subject Matter Expert (SME) or classroom teacher; and more on the learner: the student who the safety education activity is designed for.

In a fact sheet synthesising an in-depth literature review, NZTA emphasises that transport safety education should enable young people to use their learning to make a difference for themselves and

others (NZTA, n.d.-b). In New Zealand, students as young as five are positioned as the producers of knowledge and the drivers of social change in their own community, and case studies reveal young people themselves are making a tangible difference to their own and others' safety in their communities as a result of participating in NZTA's lessons (New Zealand Curriculum Online, 2011).

Discussion

A framework shift in Australasian transport safety education from 'knowledge giving' to 'knowledge producing' has the potential to help young people make meaningful contributions to transport safety in their own communities. What if, instead of asking, "What problems do we have with young people, and how do we change their behaviour?" transport safety educators asked, "How could we enable young people to improve transport safety within their own communities?" If critical pedagogical approaches were adopted as a framework in more transport safety education programs, could the changes we need in transport safety actually be led and achieved by young people themselves?

References

- Kincheloe, J. L. (2004). *Critical Pedagogy Primer*. New York, NY, USA: Peter Lang Publishing. Retrieved from <http://site.ebrary.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/lib/waikato/detail.action?docID=10120646>
- New Zealand Curriculum Online (2011). *New Zealand Transport Agency case studies*. Retrieved from <https://education.nzta.govt.nz/resources/primary/primary-case-studies>
- New Zealand Transport Agency (n.d.-a). Education Portal: *Resources*. Retrieved from <https://education.nzta.govt.nz/resources>
- New Zealand Transport Agency (n.d.-b). Research Summary: Effective Community and School Based Road Safety for Young People. Good Practice in Road Safety [Fact Sheet]. Retrieved from https://education.nzta.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/54801/What-doesnt-work-for-young-road-users-and-why.pdf
- Rowan, L., & Bigum, C. (2010). At the hub of it all: Knowledge Producing Schools as sites for educational and social innovation. In D. Clandfield & G. Martell (Eds.), *The School as Community Hub: Beyond Education's Iron Cage* (pp. 185-203). Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Retrieved from http://www98.griffith.edu.au/dspace/bitstream/handle/10072/36741/63269_1.pdf?sequence=1
- TrackSAFE Foundation (n.d.). TrackSAFE Education: *Learning Resource Centre*. Retrieved from <http://tracksafeeducation.com.au/teachers/teachers/learning-resource-centre/>