Drama: an effective tool to raise tobacco awareness and critical thinking among young students

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Adolescence is a peculiar period characterized by the urge of taking risks and experimenting. This often leads young people to adopt potentially dangerous behaviors both for their own and for other people's health.

A survey carried out in Italy shows a prevalence of smoking behaviour around 27.1% of the Italian population in the age group between 15 and 24 years*. Even more alarming is the information specific to the first cigarette age. In fact, 13.8% of smokers report having started smoking before the age of 15* years.

(Doxa, 2019).
These results are consistent with what was reported by ESPAD survey, which found that about 1% of 11-year-olds, 6% of 13-year-olds and 20% of 15-year-olds smoke at least one cigarette a week.

People who start smoking during adolescence develop a stronger addiction to nicotine (Kendler et al., 2013). They are more likely to suffer from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cancer, atherosclerosis, cardiovascular disease and anxiety disorders during adulthood.

*ESPAD survey of 2011
**Moylan et al., 2013; Pirie et al., 2013; USDHHS, 2004).
School Projects

The need to promote innovative and effective actions to fight the spread of smoking among preteens and adolescents is a must.

Education settings are optimal for implementing cigarette smoking prevention interventions for young children and adolescents**. Yet, traditional sit-desk interventions with an informative approach on smoking-related health hazards seem to be ineffective.

(*USPSTF, 2013*)
Agenti 00Sigarette and Specchio Riflesso

The Italian League Against Cancer Milan developed Specchio Riflesso* and Agenti 00Sigarette, two innovative school interventions based on social theatre methodology to promote preadolescents’ self-reflection on identity and their role within a group to facilitate critical reflection toward tobacco smoking.

*Contribution 5xmille LILT Sede Centrale
The two projects were studied and researched thanks to the scientific contribution of the Department of Psychology of the Milan Bicocca University by Professor Patrizia Steca, Marco D'Addario, Dario Monzani. Alessio Gamba gave his scientific contribution to Agenti 00Sigarette.
LILT's philosophy for health education interventions

The paths of self-construction - M. Montessori
The positive vision of man - J.J. Rousseau
The value of the game - F. Froebel
Education of the heart - J.h. Pestalozzi
The role of experience - J. Dewey
Teamwork - R. Cousinet

Creativity as the seat of cultural experience - D.W. Winnicott
Social Theatre

Social theater that can be defined as that creative and cooperative process that «happens when theater is implemented in a social context with a social / educational goal. Social theatre activates the growth of the individual, the group and their relationship with the context - environment, relationships, family, work - through the workshop practice the creation of a final communicative act (outcome / show) involving all the participants and an audience» (Teatro Sociale Marche, 2017)
The LILT methodology for health education interventions
Methodology for health education interventions
AGENTI 00SIGARETTE

*LILT awareness campaign in primary schools (age 9)*
PRIMARY FIRST!

The conquest of knowledge and awareness originates first within the school context. That is where we usually decide to embrace one lifestyle rather than another. If we know the needs of pre-adolescents (critical, cooperative, creative), it is possible to lay the foundations, even before the adolescent phase, to prevent the use of tobacco by offering other conscious ways of coping with future peer pressure. It is therefore essential to provide children as early as Primary School with the appropriate tools to stimulate the attention and set the basis to a healthy lifestyle.
Agenti00Sigarette is based on a workshop carried out by specifically trained experts and involve children age 9. The workshop integrates scientific contents with social theatrical techniques. The aim is to promote in children the development of those socio-behavioral skills that are protective factors in against risky behaviors, including smoking. Positive and negative emotions and attitudes towards smoking, and self-efficacy to resist peer pressure and to express opinions have been assessed through questionnaires.

Video Agenti 00Sigarette
Awareness-raising and in-depth materials are distributed to pupils, teachers and parents.

A family brochure to project insights

Teacher brochure

A club card and a contest during the final rendez-vous on World No Tobacco Day
RESEARCH AND EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

RESEARCH OVER 4 YEARS

Evaluation of the intervention in relation to:

- Knowledge about smoking
- Cognitive representation
- Negative attitudes
PARTECIPANTS

LILT INTERVENTION:
• 475 boys/girls

NO LILT INTERVENTION:
• 348 boys/girls
LILT intervention promotes a more accurate understanding of smoking and its effects.

Level of knowledge about smoking
«Nicotine acts on the brain?»

Agenti 00 Sigarette
LILT intervention promotes a more critical and negative attitude towards smoking

Negative attitudes:
The sale of tobacco should be banned minors (under 18)?
Cognitive representation

LILT intervention promotes a broader and more precise representation of smoking.
SPECCHIO RIFLESSO

LILT awareness campaign in secondary schools (age 13)
Specchio Riflesso’s aim is to bring pre-adolescents to greater awareness, to clarify, and to submit a critical reflection to attitudes and emotions associated with their choices around smoking, but also the positive and negative connotations associated with smoking and people who smoke.

The aim is to

• resist to peer pressure
• enhance the capacity of independent judgment and decision making
Specchio Riflesso is not centred on detailed information about smoking harmful effects but on the ability to reflect on experiences and possible behaviors in a logic of personal empowerment. Through social theater a framework is created - in which girls and boys can discover how they could feel, act, think or choose in certain situations without the pressure of being judged.
No. 4 workshops and theatrical actions based on a set canvas and the possibility of identification choices.

Group theatrical activity to reflect / experiment on the concept of myself and ourselves

ME? … ME WHO?

US? … US WHO?
In Specchio Riflesso’s methodological approach every student or class group is offered stimuli for the construction of theatrical situations from which it emerges - a posteriori - the criteria and decision making process or capacity to make decisions on one’s own.
RESEARCH AND EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

The project was carried out over two years based on two sessions in the first class and two sessions in the second class.

Positive and negative emotions and attitudes towards smoking, and self-efficacy to resist peer pressure and to express opinions have been assessed through questionnaires.

A group of 324 preadolescents not involved in the project was compared to the experimental group of 209 students undergoing intervention.

Both groups in secondary school were surveyed over a period of two years.
RESEARCH AND EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

LILT INTERVENTION

Evaluation of the intervention in relation to:

- Positive emotions
- Positive behaviours
- Autoefficacy to resist peer pressure
- Assertiveness
Partecipants

INTERVENTION: 209 boys/girls

NO INTERVENTION LILT: 324 boys/girls
LILT intervention favors a more critical, less naive or 'positive' thinking about cigarette smoking, compared to peers.
LILT intervention fights against the formation of more positive attitudes and a more idealized view of smoking.

Positive behaviour associated to smoking
«Is smoking ok if you do not get addicted?»
LILT intervention helps to feel more capable of resisting the pressures of deviant peers.

Sense of self efficacy
«How capable are you to say no to your friends cigarette offer?»
Assertivity

«How capable are you of expressing your ideas when your friends are discussing something?»

LILT intervention promotes assertiveness
SPECCHIO RIFLESSEO RESULTS

The intervention seems to be particularly effective in reducing the association between positive emotions and smoking behavior, thus reducing its attractiveness.
• Counteracting positive attitudes towards cigarette smoking: similar to what has been shown for positive emotions, the intervention is effective in reducing the attractiveness of smoking, hindering the formation of a more positive representation.
• Increase the convictions of perceived effectiveness in expressing one's opinion.
Results both for Agenti 00Sigarette and Specchio Riflesso attest the efficacy of the methodology to diminish the attractiveness of cigarettes, and to promote higher assertiveness towards peer pressure and self-efficacy to express opinion.

Drama and social theatre techniques can be an effective educational tool among preadolescents to promote healthy issues and maximize learning experience on health issues. Studies show the effectiveness of LILT project to contrast positive attitudes and emotions traditionally associated with cigarette by promoting interpersonal self-efficacy believes and independent thinking.
Thank you

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