

The True Impact Of Transport Safety Education: Aren't We Forgetting The Young People? A Rail Safety Education Perspective.

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Abstract

Transport safety education research tells us what to consider when developing and measuring education programs to ensure effective pedagogy and optimal impact for young people learning about road or rail safety. There can be a disconnect between research and practice when programs are not developed or run by educators, and measurements of success are driven by funding, outdated top-down policies and antiquated thinking. How can young people be expected to learn or change when they are not involved in the learning process? The TrackSAFE Foundation has addressed this by developing an evidence-based rail safety education program focusing on young people.

Background

Research into road safety education programs for young people highlights what constitutes good practice to achieve the best possible impact on road safety. Since 2009 organisations such as School Drug Education and Road Aware have pioneered a new era of safety education, advocating strengths-based approaches and establishing best practice principles (Government of Western Australia, 2009). A series of fact sheets from the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) (2015; 2015a; 2015b) further synthesises the literature and gives examples of effective road safety education for young people. The body of research is transferable to other transport sectors, such as rail safety education, with similarities in messaging; the psychology behind risk taking behaviour for road and rail users; and the major context link with level crossing safety. Yet despite all of this evidence being available to us, rail safety education practitioners, policy makers and program developers failed to incorporate the research into our practices.

Until 2013, rail safety education programs used top-down, deficit approaches such as presentations of information about risks and consequences, and fear appeals. They were delivered by rail staff such as train drivers, or police, to large groups of students. They had little pedagogical value and saw young people as passive recipients of information. In using these approaches, we were forgetting the very people we are striving to 'educate': the young people.

Agility and innovation

The rail industry realised this had to change to become responsible and remain viable. The TrackSAFE Foundation (TrackSAFE) brought the rail industry together in 2012 and identified deficiencies in Australian rail safety education practice. In 2013 TrackSAFE formed a Reference Group and launched TrackSAFE Education to lead a coordinated, consistent approach to rail safety education. They developed TrackSAFE Education: *Be on the Safe Side*; a suite of curriculum-based learning resources for school students, modelled on road safety education research and principles.

Impact

The focus for rail safety education is finally on young people. Through TrackSAFE's teacher led, student centred resources, young people are viewed as active learners who can make a genuine difference to a safety issue in their own community. Young people, their ideas and voices matter; and they should be involved in the learning process. The focus has shifted to quality pedagogy: on what and how a young person learns. By enabling young people to drive change in their own

communities, could they be motivated to ensure they, and others, stay safe around trains, platforms and level crossings?

Discussion

TrackSAFE is continuing to work with the rail industry to implement good practice principles in policy making, program development and practice. TrackSAFE will conduct ongoing outcome and process evaluations, and continuously improve its program to ensure it is pedagogically sound; relevant; and making an impact on rail safety knowledge, skills and attitudes in young people. This new approach could be the beginning of a more effective long term strategy, as part of a safe system approach, to reducing fatalities and injuries on the Australian rail network.

References

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