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Use of environmental teaching kits in Hong Kong

Abstract

A systematic postal survey of 449 schools (including kindergartens, primary and secondary schools) was conducted to investigate the use of environmental education teaching kits and to obtain feedback from teachers about the view and comments in using these kits. Results indicated that kindergartens used teaching kits more frequent than secondary and primary schools. Most of the schools found the existing teaching kits helpful. Appropriate content, updated information, attractiveness to students and inclusion of teachers' guide were considered important criteria in deciding the use of teaching kits. Good illustrations, quality production and appropriate duration for the class were considered important factors too. Tight teaching schedule was the major hindrance for secondary and primary schools to use environmental teaching kits. However, the main hindrance for using environmental teaching kits in kindergartens was that they did not have sufficient copies. Hong Kong schools would like to see new teaching kits about waste recycling, energy conservation, green behaviour, air pollution, noise pollution, sewage treatment and wildlife endangering focusing on Hong Kong and China.

1. Background

Pollution problems in Hong Kong are similar to those experienced in many urban areas in the world. However, what is different in Hong Kong is the intensity of such pressure resulting from a limited land area for urban development, rapid population growth and large scale industrialization (Hills, 1988). The Hong Kong Government has played an important role in enhancing the environmental awareness of the Hong Kong community. The government's White Paper entitled *Pollution in Hong Kong: A Time to Act* was published on World Environment Day, June 5, 1989 (Hong Kong Government, 1989). It stated the Government's overall objectives for environmental education, which are:

- to make our community aware of its responsibilities in creating and maintaining a healthy and pleasant environment;
- to encourage the development of a well informed, environmentally aware and responsible community;
- to make decision makers more aware of the implications of their decisions on the environment and the health and welfare of the community (Hong Kong Government, 1989).

The Hong Kong Government established the Environmental Campaign Committee (ECC) in 1990 to organize environmental events and activities aimed at the promotion of public awareness of environmental issues. The Committee has organized a number of territory-wide environmental awareness campaigns including World Environment Day, the Environmental Protection Festival and Student Environmental Protection Ambassador Scheme. It also publishes a monthly bulletin "ECCO" to focus public attention on environmental issues and activities carried out by green groups and community groups. It was distributed free to schools, housing estates, libraries and in the South China Morning Post Young Post and its circulation was about 30,000 (Environmental Protection Department, 1995).

In 1992, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) set up a Community Relations Unit dedicated to improving the public's understanding of environmental issues. The Unit provides assistance to community groups and environmental committees on how to organize environmental awareness and recycling programmes and contributes to publication of environmental materials such as the environmental handbook of the Curriculum Development Institute. Another milestone was reached with the opening of two Environmental Resources Centres in 1993 and 1997, providing public access to environmental information. The two centres have had more than 64,000 visitors since the opening. A new mobile environmental resources centre will come into trial operation in early 1999 (Environmental Protection Department, 1998). A further development in efforts to improve environmental education was the setting-up of the HK\$100 million Environment and Conservation Fund/Woo Wheelock Green Fund in August 1994 to support environmental education and research projects organized by schools, green groups and community groups.

Children are the future opinion formers and decision-makers. A multitude of environmental awareness programmes was implemented to train the children and young people to be green citizens. These included the Student Environmental Protection Ambassador Scheme, the School Recycling Scheme and the Schools Environmental Award Scheme.

Student Environmental Protection Ambassador Scheme was implemented to encourage primary and secondary school students to promote environmental protection in the schools. Students took initiative to organize exhibitions or talks on environmental issues, start a green newspaper, create green games and other activities. In 1997/98 school year, 300 schools participated and 3,026 student ambassadors were appointed. The School Waste Paper Recycling Scheme was implemented to collect waste paper generated in schools for recycling and to enhance students' understanding on the importance of conserving resources and waste separation. Over 300 schools participated in the Scheme in 1997. The Schools Environmental

Awards Scheme was implemented to award schools with outstanding performance in organizing environmental protection activities and teachers who played an important role in guiding and encouraging student participation. Local green groups also help to promote environmental protection in schools by delivering green talks and workshops targeting at students, teachers and school principals. There is a Hong Kong Environmental Education Working Group with non-government representatives discussing how to involving schools and students in environmental protection (Environmental Protection Department, 1998).

In terms of formal environmental education, seven tertiary education institutions in Hong Kong are offering formal environmental courses at degree levels. Two technical colleges also provide technical and vocational training for the environmental industry. The Education Department introduced environmental topics in the Advanced Supplementary Level syllabus and published “Guidelines of environmental education in schools”.

Hong Kong students were very knowledgeable on general and local environmental issues. A survey on 1,032 secondary school students found that the average score for environmental knowledge was 60.7 on a 100-point scale (Chan, 1995). Another survey on 992 secondary school students also indicated that they held positive environmental attitudes. They were willing to make contribution in the protection of the environment by participating in various pro-environmental activities (Chan, 1998a). A survey of 704 shoppers found that students were more willing to pay more for environmental friendly products and scored the highest in green consumerism knowledge (Chan, 1998b).

During the period 1990 to 1996, Government departments and local green groups have developed ten environmental educational kits for use by pre-school children, primary and secondary students. Six teaching kits were targeted at secondary schools, two teaching kits were targeted at primary schools and two teaching kits were targeted at kindergartens. An environmental teaching kit systematically collated and presented information about a specific

global or local environmental topic with visual and/or audio illustrations. Some included newspaper clippings to facilitate discussions and debates and some include teaching guides with suggested teaching strategies. The producers distributed them to schools as supplementary education teaching materials for environmental education by sending them to the school heads. School heads would usually pass them to teachers interested or involved in environmental education. Although environmental conditions change, there was an absence of efforts to update the information in the teaching kits. As a result, materials in the teaching kits would become out-dated. It is also noted that producers seldom made spare copies to cater for new schools or for those schools where the kits were lost as a result of staff turnover or other reasons.

2. Research objectives

This study attempted to investigate the use of these teaching kits on environmental education and to obtain views and comments from teachers about using them.

The objectives of the study are:

- to investigate the accessibility, the usage and perceived usefulness of these teaching kits;
- to explore the criteria in deciding the use of the teaching kits and the reasons that may hinder their use;
- to collect views about topics and preferred format of new teaching kits;

3. Research method

3.1 Sample

A list of 475 secondary schools, 908 primary schools, and 750 kindergartens (including local and international schools) registered as of July, 1996 in Hong Kong was obtained from the Education Department. A systematic random sample of one third of the schools was selected. A total of 712 schools (159 secondary schools, 303 primary schools and 250 kindergartens) formed the sample. A letter together with a questionnaire and a pre-paid return envelope were mailed to the principals of the sampled schools in October 1996. The principals

were required to assign one or more of their teachers that were responsible for activities or subjects related to environmental education to complete and return the questionnaire.

Telephone contacts were made to follow-up and encourage schools to respond in November 1996.

By December 1996, 449 schools had returned the completed questionnaires. The response rate was considered high for a postal survey (63.1%). The final sample consisted of 97 secondary schools, 198 primary schools and 154 kindergartens.

4. Results

4.1 Usage of environmental education teaching kits

The accessibility of environmental education teaching kits is listed in Table 1. They are arranged in descending order of percentages of ownership of these teaching kits. Results indicated that schools differed greatly in the accessibility of the teaching kits. For the six teaching kits produced for the secondary schools, the possession rate ranged from 18% for *Hong Kong's great debate pack* to 60% for *Hoi Ha Wan*. For the two teaching kits produced for the primary schools, *Let's all make it greener world* had a possession rate of 79% while *Mai Po primary teachers' pack* had a possession rate of 35%. For the two teaching kits produced for the kindergartens, *Pre-school environmental education teaching kit* had a possession rate of 47% while *Green spirit* had a possession rate of 23%. Primary schools and kindergartens were more certain about whether they had kept the specified teaching kits. A high proportion of secondary schools reported that they were not sure whether they had kept the specified teaching kits or simply missed out the answers.

Table 2 summarizes the reported frequency of use of teaching kits in the last academic year. The table includes only those schools with the specific teaching kits. Those who reported that they did not keep at least a copy of the kit or they were not sure whether they had a copy were excluded.

Results indicated that the usage of teaching kits were not frequent. For secondary schools, four out of six teaching kits were used one to five times by 60 to 70% of the schools that possessed the kits. Close to 60% of the schools reported that they had never used two of the six teaching kits in the last academic year. Kindergartens used teaching kits much more frequently than primary and secondary schools. There was a significant higher percentage of schools that used the teaching kits more than ten times among kindergartens than primary or secondary schools.

Table 3 summarizes the perceived usefulness of the teaching kits. For the secondary schools, the teaching kit *Anti pollution pack: One minute to mid-night* was the most well received one. Thirty-six percent of the schools found it very helpful and eight percent found it extremely helpful. *Wetland conservation discussion pack* was the second most well received teaching kit. Twenty-seven percent of the schools found it very helpful and eight percent found it extremely helpful. Teaching kits for primary schools were modestly well received. Thirty-one percent of schools found *Let's all make it greener world* very or extremely helpful. Twenty-two percent found *Mai Po primary teachers' pack* very or extremely helpful. Teaching kits for kindergartens were extremely well received. Fifty-one percent of kindergartens found *Pre-school environmental education teaching kit* very helpful and fourteen percent found it extremely helpful. Thirty-four percent found *Green spirit* very helpful and fourteen percent found it extremely helpful.

4.2 Factors influencing use of teaching kits

Table 4 reports the perceived importance of a list of seven criteria in deciding the use of teaching kits. Results indicated that the criteria were very similar among schools of different levels. Appropriate content, updated information, attractiveness to students and inclusion of teachers' guide were the four most important criteria in determining the use of the teaching kits. At least forty percent of the schools considered them extremely important factors. Good

illustrations, quality production and appropriate duration were considered very important criteria. Kindergartens considered good illustrations a more important criterion than secondary and primary schools.

Table 5 summaries the reasons that may hinder the use of these teaching kits. For secondary and primary schools, the tight teaching schedule was considered the main reason for not using the teaching kits. For kindergartens, insufficient copies were considered the main reason for not using them. For secondary schools, insufficient copies and inappropriate content were the other two main reasons reported by at least forty percent of the schools. For primary schools, insufficient copies and not user-friendly design and format were the other two main reasons reported by at least forty percent of the schools. For kindergartens, more than thirty percent of the schools reported that they had difficulties in using them because of tight teaching schedule and the design/format of the kits was not user-friendly. Outdated information and poor production quality were not considered as major hindrance.

4.3 Views on new teaching kits

Schools are given a list of fourteen topics to choose from for future development of teaching kits. They could select as many as they wished and they could also add new topics that are not included in the list. Table 6 summarizes the topics that the teachers expressed interest. On average, schools chose 7.5 topics. The six most popular topics selected by all schools included waste recycling, energy conservation, green behaviours, air pollution, noise pollution and sewage treatment. It suggested that schools were more practical oriented and preferred to receive teaching kits on green actions and activities. Schools were also interested in pollution problems that were visible and might have direct influence on everyday lives. Schools were less interested in global environmental threats. Fewer schools were interested in environmental disasters and environmental topics of a more general nature.

Table 7 summarizes preferred format of the new teaching kits. Videos and teachers' guides were preferred by over 80% of schools of all levels. The preferred format was quite different among schools of different levels. For secondary schools, the next preferred format included worksheets, slides, games and transparencies. For primary schools, the next preferred formats included worksheets, games, posters and tapes. For kindergartens, the next preferred formats included games, worksheets, posters and slides. Reading materials, transparencies and CD-ROM were more readily received among secondary schools. Games, tapes and leaflets were more readily received among primary schools and kindergartens.

Table 8 summarizes the geographic emphasis of the new teaching kits. The Majority of the primary and secondary schools preferred that the emphasis of the new teaching kits should be on Hong Kong and China. However, kindergartens preferred that the emphasis of the new teaching kits should be on Hong Kong alone.

5. Recommendations and conclusions

The survey indicates that the existing environmental teaching kits were not readily accessible to the schools. In the process of data collection, some teachers expressed their requests to obtain copies for certain title of teaching kits and some teachers spelled out their previous difficulties in getting them. It is, therefore, recommended that the Environmental Protection Department could co-ordinate with the producers to ensure that all schools in Hong Kong can gain access to the environmental teaching kits. In the future, the producers should also consider making more copies for new schools. The producers should also attempt to update information in the teaching kits in order to prolong their usage lives.

For those schools which possessed the teaching kits, most of them used the kits one to five times a year. Kindergartens used teaching kits more frequent than secondary and primary schools. It was found that two teaching kits for secondary schools had never been used in the past academic year. One was about marine species and the other was a debate pack. This may be

because of their relatively narrower scope in content and in application. Most of the schools found the existing teaching kits quite helpful and very helpful. Again, kindergarten teachers found teaching kits more useful than primary and secondary schools.

Appropriate content, updated information, attractiveness to students and inclusion of teachers' guide were considered utmost important criteria in deciding the use of teaching kits. Good illustration, quality production and appropriate duration for the class were considered important factors too. The tight teaching schedule was the major hindrance for secondary and primary schools to use environmental teaching kits. Insufficient copies were the main hindrance for kindergartens.

The teachers expressed that they would like to see new teaching kits about waste recycling, energy conservation, green behaviour, air pollution, noise pollution, sewage treatment and endangered wildlife. They preferred that the new teaching kits should be in videos, with teachers' guide and worksheets. Secondary school teachers preferred also to have transparencies and slides. Primary school teachers preferred to have games, posters, and tapes. Kindergarten teachers preferred to have games, posters, and slides. Majority of the schools stated that the new teaching kits should focus on Hong Kong and China.

The study has the potential to provide environmental educators with a viable model for teaching environmental subjects at various academic levels. The findings also serve as important guidelines for interested groups to design new teaching kits for environmental education in Hong Kong. While the use of teaching kits will enhance the learning of prominent environmental issues, one must not ignore other active forms of environmental education. Schools should organize more field trips to encourage students to have direct contact and experience with the beauty of the nature and the salience of environmental problems.

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Table 1 Accessibility of environmental education teaching kits

Teaching kit	Producer	Yes (%)	No (%)	Not sure / Missing (%)
Secondary schools (N=95)				
Hoi Ha Wan (1994)	WWFHK	59.8	28.9	11.3
Wetland conservation discussion pack (1996)	WWFHK	49.5	39.2	11.3
Anti pollution pack 'One minute to mid-night' (1990)	EPD	37.1	49.5	13.4
Urbanization and the Environment (1990)	WWFHK	32.0	53.6	14.4
Marine education pack/ Species diversity in rocky shore (1993)	WWFHK	26.8	50.5	22.7
Hong Kong's great debate pack (1992)	WWFHK	17.5	60.8	21.6
Primary schools (N=190)				
Let's all make it greener world (1992)	ECC	79.3	18.2	2.5
Mai Po primary teachers' pack (1995)	WWFHK	34.8	56.1	9.1
Kindergartens (N=144)				
Pre-school environmental education teaching kit (1996)	Friends of the Earth	47.4	48.1	4.5
Green spirit (1993)	Green Power	22.7	65.6	11.7

WWFHK: World Wild Fund for Nature (Hong Kong); EPD: Environmental Protection Department; ECC: Environmental Campaign Committee

Table 2 Frequency of use of teaching kits in last academic year

Teaching kit	More than 10 times (%)	6 to 10 times (%)	1 to 5 times (%)	Never used (%)	Don't know (%)
Secondary schools*					
Hoi Ha Wan	0.0	5.2	62.1	29.3	3.4
Wetland conservation discussion pack	2.1	2.1	60.4	33.3	2.1
Anti pollution pack 'One minute to mid-night'	5.6	8.3	61.1	11.1	13.9
Urbanization and the Environment	0.0	0.0	67.7	19.4	12.9
Marine education pack/ Species diversity in rocky shore (1993)	0.0	0.0	34.6	57.7	7.7
Hong Kong's great debate pack	0.0	0.0	29.4	58.8	11.8
Primary schools*					
Let's all make it greener world	1.9	7.6	69.4	12.7	8.3
Mai Po primary teachers' pack	1.4	4.3	55.1	26.1	13.0
Kindergartens*					
Pre-school environmental education teaching kit	16.4	6.8	72.6	2.7	1.4
Green spirit	25.7	8.6	51.4	11.4	2.9

* Include schools with the specific teaching kits only

Table 3 Helpfulness of teaching kits

Teaching kit	Extremely helpful (%)	Very helpful (%)	Quite helpful (%)	Not quite helpful (%)	don't know (%)
Secondary schools*					
Hoi Ha Wan	5.2	19.0	37.9	12.1	25.9
Wetland conservation discussion pack	8.3	27.1	35.4	10.4	18.8
Anti pollution pack 'One minute to mid-night'	8.3	36.1	38.9	5.6	11.1
Urbanization and the Environment	3.2	12.9	48.4	12.9	22.6
Marine education pack/ Species diversity in rocky shore (1993)	0.0	7.7	30.8	11.5	50.0
Hong Kong's great debate pack	0.0	17.6	41.2	5.9	35.3
Primary schools*					
Let's all make it greener world	4.5	26.8	52.9	3.8	12.1
Mai Po primary teachers' pack	1.4	20.3	47.8	4.3	26.1
Kindergartens*					
Pre-school environmental education teaching kit	13.7	50.7	32.9	1.4	1.4
Green spirit	14.3	34.3	48.6	0.0	2.9

* Include schools with the specific teaching kits only

Table 4 Criteria in deciding the use of teaching kits

Criterion	Extremely important (%)	Very important (%)	Quite important (%)	Not quite important (%)	Mean*
Secondary School					
appropriate content	64.2	35.8	0.0	0.0	3.6
updated information	53.7	42.1	4.2	0.0	3.5
appealing to students	51.1	42.6	6.4	0.0	3.4
inclusion of teachers' guide	40.0	45.3	14.7	0.0	3.3
good illustration	22.1	54.7	18.9	3.2	3.0
quality production	24.2	55.8	20.0	0.0	3.0
appropriate duration for the class	22.1	51.6	22.1	4.2	2.9
Primary schools (N=190)					
appropriate content	57.1	34.6	8.4	0.0	3.5
updated information	55.9	31.9	12.2	0.0	3.4
appealing to students	48.7	45.0	6.3	0.0	3.4
inclusion of teachers' guide	50.0	36.7	11.7	1.1	3.4
quality production	30.0	43.7	25.8	0.5	3.0
good illustration	20.7	48.4	30.3	0.5	2.9
appropriate duration for the class	20.6	43.9	33.9	1.6	2.8
Kindergartens (N=144)					
appropriate content	55.7	38.6	5.7	0.0	3.5
appealing to students	62.7	27.5	9.9	0.0	3.5
updated information	51.4	34.3	13.6	0.7	3.4
inclusion of teachers' guide	53.5	33.1	12.7	0.7	3.4
good illustration	40.4	42.6	16.3	0.7	3.2
quality production	33.3	44.2	22.5	0.0	3.1
appropriate duration for the class	26.8	37.7	31.9	3.6	2.9

* Four-point scale with 1=not quite important and 4=extremely important

Table 5 Reasons hindering the use of teaching kits

	Secondary schools	Primary schools	Kindergartens
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
teaching schedule too tight to accommodate	72 (75.8)	151 (79.1)	53 (37.1)
insufficient copies	42 (44.2)	86 (45.0)	82 (57.3)
inappropriate content	38 (40.0)	65 (34.0)	40 (28.0)
design and format not user-friendly	27 (28.4)	83 (43.5)	44 (30.8)
information outdated	25 (26.3)	70 (36.6)	40 (28.0)
poor production quality	13 (13.7)	41 (21.5)	23 (16.1)
others	9 (9.5)	10 (5.2)	10 (7.0)

* can choose more than one reason

Table 6 Topics to be included for future development of teaching kits

Topic	Secondary schools	ols	Kinder	gartens
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	
Waste recycling	82 (85.4)	139 (72.8)	125	(83.9)
Energy conservation	71 (74.0)	146 (76.4)	128	(85.9)
Green behaviours	67 (69.8)	143 (74.9)	128	(85.9)
Air pollution	69 (71.9)	138 (72.3)	120	(80.5)
Noise pollution	59 (61.5)	130 (68.1)	119	(79.9)
Sewage treatment	68 (70.8)	129 (67.5)	96	(64.4)
Wildlife endangering	51 (53.1)	118 (61.8)	85	(57.0)
Oil spills and sea pollution	46 (47.9)	84 (44.0)	74	(49.7)
Ozone layer depletion	64 (66.7)	96 (50.3)	30	(20.1)
Dumping of toxic waste	40 (41.7)	83 (43.5)	52	(34.9)
Floods and Drought	52 (54.2)	54 (28.3)	34	(22.8)
Nuclear hazards	39 (40.6)	63 (33.0)	18	(12.1)
World Environment Day	17 (17.7)	45 (23.6)	51	(34.2)
Earthquakes	39 (40.6)	38 (19.9)	20	(13.4)
Others	2 (2.1)	4 (2.1)	2	(1.3)

* can choose more than one reason

Table 7 Preferred format of new teaching kits

Topic	Secondary schools	ols	Kinder	gartens
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	
videos	90 (94.7)	179 (93.7)	140	(94.0)
teachers' guide	78 (82.1)	172 (90.1)	126	(84.6)
worksheets	73 (76.8)	154 (80.6)	102	(68.5)
games	53 (55.8)	134 (70.2)	122	(81.9)
posters	34 (35.8)	111 (58.1)	96	(64.4)
slides	56 (58.9)	73 (38.2)	95	(63.8)
tapes	20 (21.1)	108 (56.5)	85	(57.0)
quiz	50 (52.6)	107 (56.0)	48	(32.2)
leaflets	36 (37.9)	95 (49.7)	75	(50.3)
reading materials	47 (49.5)	97 (50.8)	52	(34.9)
transparencies	62 (65.3)	77 (40.3)	35	(23.5)
CD-ROM	29 (30.5)	37 (19.4)	12	(8.1)
others	1 (1.1)	1 (0.5)	6	(4.0)

* can choose more than one reason

Table 8 Preferred geographic emphasis of new teaching kits

Topic	Secondary schools	ols	Kindergartens
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
mainly about HK and China	41 (45.1)	81 (43.3)	46 (32.2)
mainly about HK	21 (23.1)	57 (30.5)	55 (38.5)
mainly about the global situation	22 (24.2)	36 (19.3)	30 (21.0)
mainly about the Hong Kong and the global situation	6 (6.6)	8 (4.3)	7 (4.9)
mainly about South-east Asia region	1 (1.1)	4 (2.1)	5 (3.5)
mainly about the China and the global situation	0 (0.0)	1 (0.5)	0 (0.0)