

Boozeville: developing an electronic resource for alcohol education

Background

The AERC has supported *educari* in developing *Boozeville*, a CD-ROM educational resource for alcohol education: *educari* publishes a range of material for substance misuse education, including *Xoteric*, an acclaimed resource for drug education. See www.educari.com for details of *educari*'s work, and www.xoteric.com for information about the drug education resource.

While *Xoteric* includes material on alcohol, *educari* felt that there was a need for a more alcohol-focused resource, addressing the particular aspects of this substance. With considerable public concern about alcohol, and more and more evidence of its harmful effects when misused, alcohol education is gaining an increasing high profile; for example, the 2004 DfES Guidance for Schools states that: 'The Department ... expects all schools to [educate about the effects of alcohol and how to reduce alcohol-related harm] within their drug education programmes'.¹

However, an AERC-funded Cochrane Review of primary prevention of alcohol misuse found little evidence of effectiveness.² It is possible that the ineffectiveness of alcohol education is partly due to the poor quality of prevention programmes; our analysis of existing resources revealed a lack of high-quality resources, and in particular a dearth of electronic resources. As an AERC report puts it: 'For education about alcohol to be effective, the reality of the young people's world must be acknowledged, valued and to some extent replicated in the classroom'.³ Electronic resources can help to achieve these conditions.

It is widely recognised that electronic resources have an important part to play in educating children and young people. For example, the government has established the e-learning initiative to help schools to purchase such resources (www.curriculumonline.gov.uk) and in January 2006 the BBC is launching a major e-learning project, 'The digital curriculum'.⁴

Research has demonstrated that electronic resources can be effective in supporting children and young people's learning when used in an appropriate context and in combination with other teaching and learning techniques.⁵

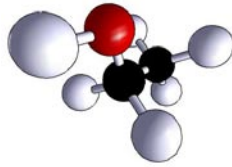
¹ DfES 2004 *Drugs :Guidance for Schools* DfES (DfES/0092/204)

² Foxcroft, et al (undated) 'Primary prevention for alcohol misuse in young people: results from a Cochrane Collaboration Systematic Review' AERC *Alcohol Insight* no. 17

³ Fox (undated) 'Alcohol Education materials for secondary schools' AERC *Alcohol Insight* 16

⁴ See www.bbc.co.uk/info/policies/digital_curriculum5.shtml

⁵ For example, a DfES study of the impact of ICT on educational attainment in England has reported that: 'ICT has been found to be positively associated with improvement in subject-based learning in several areas'. ImpACT2 study, DfES, 2002. (see www.curriculumonline.gov.uk)



However, *educari's* investigation of electronic resources for substance abuse education reported that existing resources were often well-presented but lacked quality content, and methods of delivering the content:

'It's often a case of "fancy front ends with poor quizzes beneath". There is a lack of integration between the medium and the message. These multimedia products are often horses designed by a committee, and they end up with missing legs and several humps. Which makes them hard to navigate and get around.'⁶

They also did not integrate the e-learning with other learning activities, such as group or classroom discussion. Furthermore, there was often little to help the teacher to use the resource and to assess how children were using the resource and what learning was taking place.

Boozeville has been designed to overcome these problems.

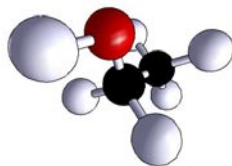
The development of the resource

At *educari* we start to create educational resources from an understanding of the *educational* issues. In the case of alcohol education we identified the following key issues as:

- providing young people with basic facts about alcohol – its effects, the ways it is packaged (understanding units, etc), the law, and so on
- raising awareness of the health risks and other dangers associated with alcohol
- helping young people to decide for themselves how they behave in relation to alcohol (helping them, for example, to resist 'peer influence')
- raising their awareness of the role of advertising and the media in promoting and normalising alcohol consumption.⁷

⁶ Ives, R 2003 'An Assessment of Electronic Resources for Drug Education' in *World Forum Montreal 2002 Proceedings 2003*

⁷ For example, a survey of Californian adolescents and their behaviour with alcohol found a strong link between enjoyment of alcohol advertisements and drinking behaviour and intentions. The authors recommended media literacy education for adolescents (See Portman Group 2003 Alcohol advertising and adolescent drinking *Quarterly Review of Alcohol Research* 11, 4 (Winter) pp4-5)



This naturally led to the development of sections of the CD-Rom addressing these topics. For example, the section entitled 'Reasons and Choices' explores reasons for drinking, such as: dependence; shyness and acquiring 'Dutch courage'; having 'more fun' (due to release of inhibitions, letting oneself go, talking more freely); the influence of others and, to some extent the pressure from friends (for example, drinking more through round-buying behaviour, etc); the role of advertising; the part played by 'boredom' ('nothing else to do', or not having the financial or personal resources to do something else) and - we strongly believe it is important to be honest - enjoyment of the effects.

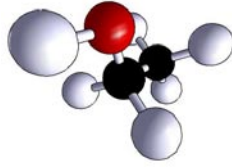
It was also important to explore reasons for *not* drinking and the CD-Rom addresses such issues as: staying in control; religious beliefs; health and fitness; and the desire to avoid dependence problems (i.e. not drinking because of problems in the past). The CD-Rom presents these positively.

The resource is interactive and aims to engage the users with the storyline. For example, in one section the user is required to solve the puzzle of 'Deano's Accident', and in another section to unmask 'Delilah Spike'. Interactivity and a range of approaches to a topic are key aspects of effective learning.

Presenting the issues

Having identified the key issues and considered how these might be addressed educationally, we worked on presenting these issues in a lively and engaging way. In our CD-Rom, *Xoteric*, we had addressed drugs issues through a game-like environment where users of the resource could freely explore the interior of a virtual nightclub and find out about the characters there and the drugs that they were using. Feedback from teachers indicated that some wanted a more structured approach that better fitted within the confines of the classroom and the demands of the curriculum.⁸ On reflection, and as a result of other feedback, we decided that the resource would also have benefited, in a classroom situation, from a stronger and more linear storyline.

⁸ However, the accompanying booklet included 'Missions' which defined tasks to undertake with the electronic part of the resource. It also should be pointed out that the rather open nature of *Xoteric* was particularly appealing in informal educational contexts.



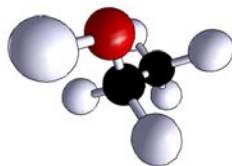
Thus, for *Boozeville*, we decided to create a series of storylines within an overarching framework. Within this, we needed strong characters that young people could identify with. We created the main character 'Lois Team', an investigative journalist who is given assignments that turn out to be alcohol-related. The journalist character has the advantage of being someone who would naturally want to take notes at various points in the story, and so the users can be more easily induced to 'help her' with her note-taking - engaging them further with the storyline and giving them valuable writing practice.

The action takes place at various locations in Lois's hometown of Boozeville. Great care has been taken to construct locations interesting to young people (such as the local morgue!) that look good and have an affinity with the appearance of computer games with which many young people are familiar. Of course, on the rather limited budget available for the development of an educational resource we have not been able to replicate the visual excitement of big budget commercial games, but we have gone well beyond the usual depressingly 'classroom' appearance of many available resources through the use of 3-D animation, a range of good-looking locations, and realistic characters.

There is also an original soundtrack created in conjunction with Kamenyetski's Tim Stone.⁹ Drawn from various strands of popular and underground music (particularly those of Stone's Russian roots) these varied soundtracks, drawing on different musical sub-cultures, provide an interesting, textured backdrop to the action.

ICT resources are often more appealing to males than to females, so we have tried to ensure that the resource is attractive to young women as well as to young men through, for example, a strong central female character, and discussion of issues of importance to young women. The cast of characters also includes strong and positive roles for different ethnicities.

⁹ see www.kamenyetski.com



Supporting the educator

As has been discussed, to be effective for learning ICT resources generally cannot stand alone, and need support from more traditional learning methods, such as discussion and writing activities. *Boozeville* comes with a teacher's booklet containing detailed suggestions for using the CD-Rom, and developing extension activities.

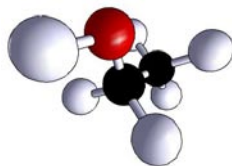
Teachers are also supported in assessing students' learning while they are using the resource. At the end of each of the five sections of the CD-Rom, the student completes a quiz addressing the topics covered in that section. The scores that the student (or group of students) gains are recorded, and the teacher can view them via a password-protected section of the CD-Rom. In this way, the teacher can be satisfied not only that a section has been completed, but that the key points have been understood.

Testing

We tested part of *Boozeville* with students in a secondary school in the Eastern Region, through observation and discussion with the students. As they worked with the resource, we observed what they were doing, and they completed a short questionnaire.

The students were engaged with the resource and enjoyed using it. Although they took a little while to work out what it was all about and how to operate the interface no explanation was necessary and all of the groups managed to use it effectively. All students reported via the questionnaire that they enjoyed using the CD-Rom. What did they enjoy about using it? Answers included:

- 'It's really cool and freaky.'
- 'The graphics and content.'
- 'It's fun to use.'
- 'It was quick and simple.'



No one said it was difficult to: 'do the things you were intended to do'.

When asked 'Did you learn anything about alcohol from using the CD-Rom?' the majority said 'yes'. We asked the young people for a sound-bite about the resource and their responses included:

- 'The CD-Rom was very fun and kids learn more when they are doing something they enjoy rather than if they were board [sic] silly.'
- 'The game is very good because it was fun and it is easy to use.'
- 'It is very realistic and children my age would love it.'
- 'It's very realistic and gives you loads of info.'
- 'Easy to use and fun!'
- 'Disturbing, kids would love it.'

Further information

For more information about *Boozeville* and its development, see the dedicated website, www.boozeville.com, or contact the author.

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