

Article 1: Collingwood and Road Safety

Young Drivers road safety is a challenging topic. There exists plenty of educational activity using theatre to address its issues. What can we do differently? This is the question we asked ourselves here at Collingwood Learning. Our research suggests that in nearly all educational programmes of this sort there are two levels of intervention with young people.

- Awareness raising
- Behavioural transformation

What do we mean by this? We believe that there is a significant difference when working with young people, between providing a learning experience which is hard hitting, and presents facts about a topic, and an experience which seeks to help young people address the attitudinal and psychological underpinning which drives behaviour.

In summary, a theatre in education programme can communicate the facts about young drivers / pedestrians being at far greater risk than other groups, we can point out the very real risk factors that can affect safety, such as drugs, alcohol, and peer pressure. However if we are to create behavioural change, then we need to do more than address behaviours which are largely symptoms of a wider perception of self amongst young people.

At the heart of research into young drivers' attitudes there lies a basic truth – young people, and males in particular, have a perception of their own abilities and safety which is incongruent with reality. This changes over time and experience of driving but if we are to change behaviours amongst young people who are in the bracket, then we must help them to understand the difference between perceptions of risk, and risk itself.

Why do young drivers have a larger percentage within their group who have this almost sub-conscious attitude? Research is in some cases conflicting but we know that for this age group, a heady cocktail of influences, both social and psychological, can drive this. Desire to attract; thrill; be 'adult'; freedom; rebellion; physical strength; quick reactions; wanting to impress; personal mastery; urgency; pleasure; anti-social behaviour; power and control, are but a few potential reasons for this perception. They mask young people from reality, which actually tells us that largely due to inexperience in judgement and decision making, young people are more at risk of accidents even without impairing judgement further, due to alcohol or drugs.

Collingwood view road safety education at its best as being an opportunity for young people to learn about themselves, and their relationship with risk. Ray Fuller, from the school of Psychology, Trinity College Dublin, described educational interventions as needing to focus on;

- Development of appropriate attitudes to car use
- Including development of perceived norms anchored in reality
- Development of understanding of own impulses and needs and limitations
- Development of understanding of social processes and effects on behaviour and how to deal with them
- Development of skills in hazard perception

- Development of skills in how **not** to create hazards
- Transfer to alternative modes of self expression and sensation seeking

It is this focus on changing mindset which is our greatest challenge. Does a typical 17 year old know the speed limits, not to drink and drive, and that mobile phone use when driving is banned? Yes. But statistics show this age group are far more likely to do it anyway. Helping them understand why is what will actually affect change.