Picture codes as discussion starters in AIDS education

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A picture code has been successfully tested in Zimbabwe as a means of stimulating discussion on AIDS control among women and adolescent girls.

Problem-posing education is very important in AIDS control. It shifts the focus from the trainer to the learner and uses methods that raise questions, stimulate discussion, and permit issues to be explored in depth. In this context, codes can be used to present familiar problems that people feel strongly about and wish to discuss. They come in various forms, including proverbs, mimes and songs, and in Zimbabwe picture codes are becoming a significant part of the AIDS educational toolkit.

A picture code is a poster-sized illustration in which clear drawings are combined to convey a story; it presents a real-life problem about which a community or group is concerned. In Zimbabwe, picture codes are being used in AIDS education to help people to focus on the subject, think critically about it, and seek new solutions through discussion.

Whereas a poster usually carries an illustration presenting the solution to a problem, a picture code contains illustrations that pose the problem. Posters are displayed in public places so that people can study them in their own time; they serve as visual reminders to behave in a certain way. Picture codes, on the other hand, are displayed only to groups of people who have been brought together to engage in discussion.

The differences between picture codes and posters are summarized below.

Picture codes:
- pose problems;
- are used in small-group situations;
- encourage discussion;
- have no captions.

Posters:
- usually present solutions;
- are displayed in public places;
- do not encourage discussion;
- have captions.

How is a picture code used?

The task of the facilitator is to:
- convene a group of people at a place suitable for discussion;
- position the picture code where it can be clearly seen, for instance on a mat on the ground, nailed to a tree, or stuck on a wall;
- guide the group through the following sequence of questions designed to encourage discussion.

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Picture codes in AIDS education

The picture code shown in the figure has been evaluated in various AIDS projects (2), its theme having been developed through observation and discussion. It was pretested before publication (3).

The code was shown separately to two volunteer groups of 20 mothers and 30 adolescent schoolgirls living in a high-density suburb of Harare, and their responses to the questions indicated above were noted.

The mothers immediately recognized and described the code, agreed that the illustration showed a familiar situation, and angrily suggested that the reason for it was that rich men wanted girls who were uninfected with human immunodeficiency virus. The group unanimously considered that young girls had too much freedom and recreation time, lead-

How is a picture code prepared?

Certain basic rules have to be observed in the preparation of a picture code.

- The theme should be based on a real-life problem about which information has been gathered through a community survey.
- The code should be prepared in draft and pretested before publication.
- It should:
  - depict only one issue;
  - provide a clear illustration of the problem, avoiding unnecessary detail and colour;
  - convey a story that can be comprehended without the help of a caption;
  - not contain abstract drawings that cannot easily be understood or recognized;
  - be on at least A4 format so that it can be seen at some distance.
ing to promiscuity. Things were not the same as in the past: young people did not listen to their parents and values had changed. It was felt that the solution lay within the formal education system, since “aunties” who had traditionally assumed responsibility for sex education were no longer fulfilling this role.

The adolescent girls suggested that one reason for the behaviour shown was that parents did not meet the needs of young girls who were short of money for personal necessities or the luxuries that sugar daddies could offer. The girls said that they could not discuss sexual matters at home with their parents, and they blamed “aunties” for not providing sex education as in the past. It was agreed that the girls obtained most of their information on sexual matters from their peers. One of the biggest problems was how to reject sexual advances made by men. It emerged that there was a need for training in assertiveness skills and for the delegation of responsibility for sex education, possibly within the formal school setting.

In comparison with traditional methods of communication where groups are given information in lectures and talks, carefully illustrated picture codes can provide a useful stimulus for discussion on issues of concern. In Zimbabwe the use of a picture code encouraged group discussants to focus on AIDS control in their everyday lives and helped facilitators to discover what people thought about their problems.

References

