



University of HUDDERSFIELD

University of Huddersfield Repository

Chipperfield, Sarah and Woodcock, Pete

“I would have switched off if it was just government legislation.” The Simpsons and the Teaching of Public Health Policy

Original Citation

Chipperfield, Sarah and Woodcock, Pete (2009) “I would have switched off if it was just government legislation.” The Simpsons and the Teaching of Public Health Policy. In: International Association of Health Policy in Europe Conference 2009: Condition Critical - Health care, Marketising Reforms and the Media, 17th - 19 June 2009, Coventry, UK. (Unpublished)

This version is available at <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/10102/>

The University Repository is a digital collection of the research output of the University, available on Open Access. Copyright and Moral Rights for the items on this site are retained by the individual author and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full items free of charge; copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided:

- The authors, title and full bibliographic details is credited in any copy;
- A hyperlink and/or URL is included for the original metadata page; and
- The content is not changed in any way.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk.

<http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/>

“I would have switched off if it was just government legislation.”

The Simpsons and the Teaching of Public Health Policy

Sarah Chipperfield and Pete Woodcock
The University of Huddersfield



Overview of paper

1. The Challenge; why health policy?
2. The Problem; student interest
3. Informal Education; using life's learning
4. Using *The Simpsons*; a justification
5. Example of a Teaching Plan
6. Student Feedback
7. Conclusion

Teaching Public Health Policy

The Challenge

- The importance of public health policy in undergraduate education
- ‘Create an NHS that helps people to stay healthy’ (Darzi, 2008, p.9)
- Diversification of professional roles
- Encourage lifelong engagement with public health policy

The Problem

- Students often find health policy uninteresting as it is a different intellectual exercise from practical health issues
- We also wanted to introduce some underlying principles upon which one can judge policy (J.S. Mill's 'Harm Principle' in this instance)
- The problem was how to do this in a manner that students would find engaging
- *The Simpsons* provided us with an opportunity



Informal Education

- Informal education is the learning that an individual does outside of a formal learning environment (school, university etc.)
- The learning one does in everyday life
- This can mean learning from everyday situations, or using television, films websites etc.
- Part of what government calls *The Learning Revolution*



The Simpsons

- *The Simpsons* is the longest running feature length cartoon whose first episode was aired in 1989 (an 18 year old undergraduate student could have been born in 1991) – it is their cultural backdrop!
- Academics have published on using it as a teaching tool for, amongst other subjects Politics, Law, Maths, Religion and Sociology

Sweets and Sour Marge (DABF03)

- In this episode Marge is horrified when Springfield, to much pride from its residents, is dubbed 'fat city USA'; the fattest town in the world
- Marge manages to get sugar banned in Springfield for the sake of health
- This episode allowed students to examine what health policies 'in action' looked like, consider how we could apply Mill's 'harm principle' and the barriers health professionals face when trying to promote public health



Teaching Plan

Sweets and Sour Marge

Watch Sweets and Sour Marge

- Task 1: List Marge's justifications for banning sugar
- Task 2: Introduce students to J.S. Mill's 'Harm Principle'
- Task 3: Students consider what can and cannot be banned by the state, with regard to health, according to Mill's 'Harm Principle'



Sweets and Sour Marge

- Task 4: What would Mill have thought of 'Marge's law'? Ask students what they think and if sugary foods constitute a poison?

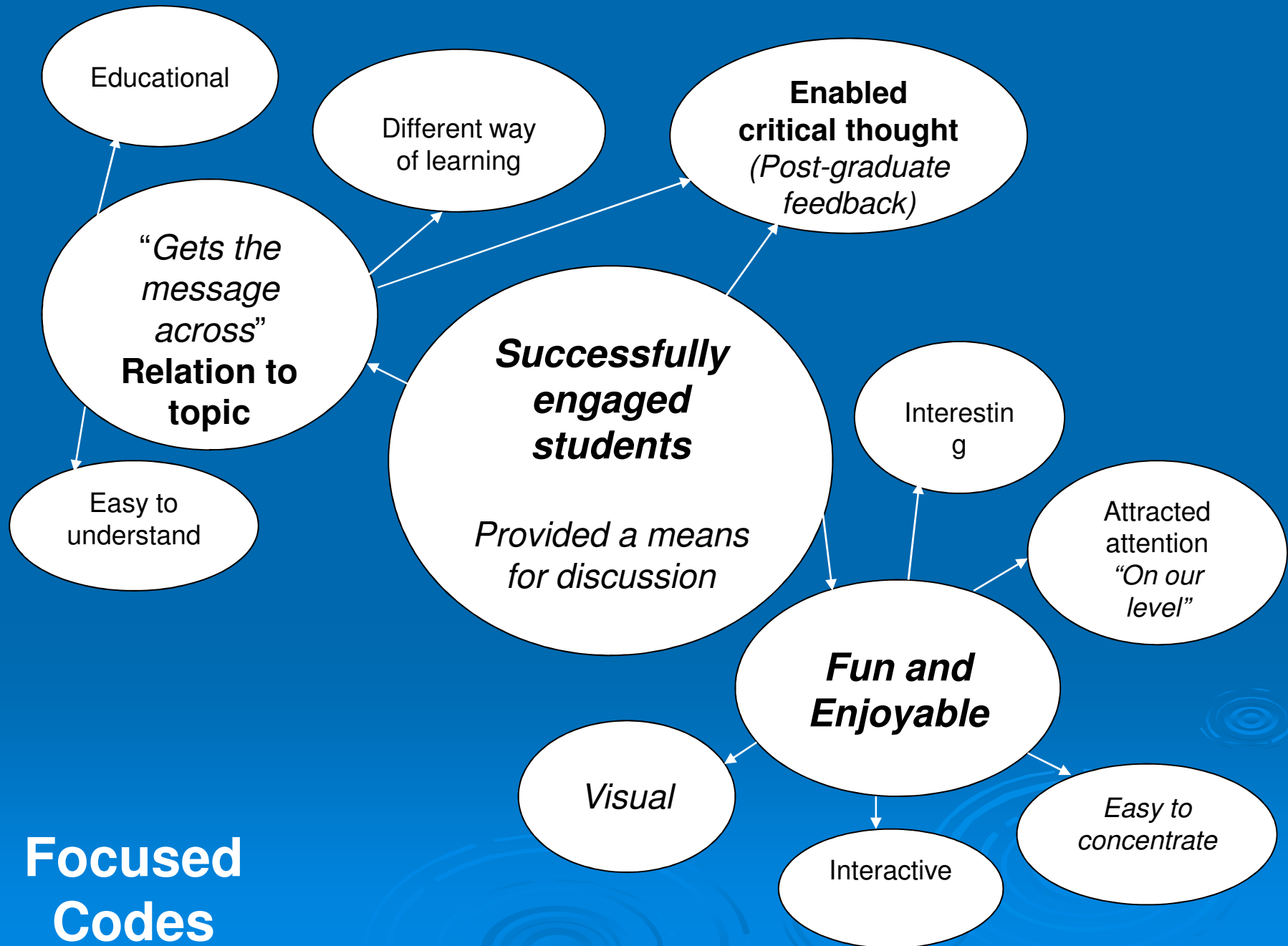
Plenary session on health promotion

- Task 5: Consider the barriers Marge faced when trying to promote health
- Task 6: Conclude highlighting issues faced by health professionals



Student Feedback

- Success! Learning objectives achieved and considerable debate raised within the class
- Successfully engaged all students
- Students asked for written feedback
- The Simpsons episode complemented the discussion of the 'Harm Principle', aided critical thought and was felt to be a very effective teaching tool



**Focused
Codes**

Conclusion

- Informal education can be used successfully to engage students in academic learning of less favoured topics
- Carefully chosen episodes and well structured classes can provide a different way of '*getting the message across*'
- Allowed students to critically consider some of the underlying ideas that inform public health policy
- Caution- avoid over-use of cartoons so the '*novelty doesn't wear off*'



Works cited

- Armstrong, P. (no date). 'The Simpsons and Democracy. Political Apathy, Popular Culture, and Lifelong Learning as Satire'. [online] Available at: <http://www.education.leeds.ac.uk/research/uploads/36.pdf> Accessed on 29.04.09.
- Bateman, C., Baker, T., Hoornenborg, E., Ericsson, U. (2001) 'Bringing Global Issues to Medical Teaching'. *The Lancet*. 358 (Nov 3), pp: 1539-1542.
- Cantor, P.A. (1999) 'The Simpsons': Atomistic Politics and the Nuclear Family'. *Political Theory*. 27(6), pp: 734-749.
- Collier, K.G. (1980) 'Peer-group learning in Higher Education: The development of higher-order skills'. *Studies in Higher Education*. 5(1), pp: 55-62. [online] Available at: <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=713445574> Accessed on 17.07.07.
- Darzi, A. (2008) 'High Quality Care for all: NHS Next Stage Review final report'. [online] Available at:
http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_085825 Accessed on 02.06.09
- Department of Health (2009) 'News- What's new on the site?' [online] Available at: http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/News/DH_4015576 Accessed on 02.06.09
- Fink, M.A. and Foote, D.C. (2007) 'Using The Simpsons to Teach Humanities with Gen X and Gen Y Adult Students'. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*. 115 (Fall), pp: 45-54.
- Gray, J. (2005) 'Television Teaching: Parody, The Simpsons, and Media Literacy Education'. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*. 22(3), pp: 223-238.
- Hobbs, R. (1998) 'The Simpsons Meet Mark Twain: Analyzing Popular Media Texts in the Classroom'. *The English Journal*. 87(1), pp: 49-51.
- Holland, Stephen (2007), *Public Health Ethics*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Mill, John Stuart (1993), *Utilitarianism, On Liberty, Considerations on Representative Government*. London: Everyman.

Works cited

- Mill, John Stuart (1993), *Utilitarianism, On Liberty, Considerations on Representative Government*. London: Everyman.
- Perales-Palacios, F.J. and Vílchez-González, J.M. (2002) 'Teaching physics by means of cartoons: a qualitative study in secondary education'. *Physics Education*. 37(5), pp: 400-406.
- Reeves, Richard (2005), 'Even in a truly liberal society, paternalism must sometimes prevail', *New Statesman and Society*, 1st January 2005, available at <http://www.newstatesman.com/200501010026>, accessed Tuesday, 02 June 2009.
- Rhodes, C. (2001) 'D'Oh. *The Simpsons*, Popular Culture, and the Organizational Carnival'. *Journal of Management Enquiry*. 10 (4), pp: 374-383.
- Scanlan, S.J. and Feinberg, S.L. (2000) 'The Cartoon Society: Using *The Simpsons* to teach and learn sociology'. *Teaching Sociology*. 28 (April), pp: 127-139.
- Shortt, S. E. D. and Hodgetts, P.G. (1997) 'A curriculum for the times: an experiment in teaching health policy to residents in family medicine'. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. 157 (11), pp: 1567-1569.
- Smith, Mark K (1997), 'Introducing informal education' [online] Available at: <http://www.infed.org/i-intro.htm> Accessed 28.05.09
- Turner, C. (2004) *Planet Simpson*. London: Ebury Press.
- Woodcock, P (2006) The Polis of Springfield: The Simpsons and the Teaching of Political Theory. *Politics* 26(3), pp: 192-199.
- Woodcock, P (2008) Gender, politicians and public health: using *The Simpsons* to teach politics. *European Political Science*. 00, pp:1-12.