



Friendly Fire

Historical nugget

Excerpts from Dessa K. Bergen-Cico (2008), *War and Drugs: The Role of Military Conflict in the Development of Substance Abuse*, Routledge, pp. 128-129.

In 2002, two American fighter pilots, Major Harry Schmidt and Major William Umbach, killed four Canadian soldiers near Kandahar, Afghanistan, because the pilots mistakenly thought the Canadian soldiers were shooting at them. Their court defense attributed the pilots' actions to the Air Force-issued stimulant drugs they were taking at the time. The pilots had been taking the stimulant Dexedrine during the flight, under the standard-order guidelines of their commander.

Today, when pilots are finished with their missions, they are provided with Ambien or Restoril, the "no-pills," to bring them down and help them sleep and adjust after defying the body's circadian rhythms and altering neurotransmitter levels with amphetamines. The lawyer for Major Schmidt noted that the depressant sleep aid Ambien, which was given to Schmidt to help him sleep before the mission, also affected his mental state when he bombed the Canadians.

Colonel Peter Demitry, chief of the U.S. Air Force surgeon-general's science and technology division, said of the practice of dispensing "go-pills": "It is the gold standard for anti-fatigue. We know that fatigue in aviation kills ... This is a life-and-death insurance policy that saves lives ... This is a common, legal, ethical, moral and correct application."

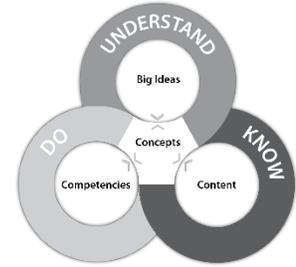
Instructional strategies

1. Review the "friendly fire" incident from 2002 in which four Canadian soldiers were killed in Afghanistan near Kandahar. You could have students read the provided [handout](#) or just summarize the incident in your own words, but be sure to quote the Colonel's statement. Then facilitate a class discussion or have students work in small groups. You might use questions like:
 - a. What are your thoughts about this incident?
 - b. Who is to blame for the deaths? Is anyone to blame? Is everyone to blame? Why?
 - c. Is it ever right to break the law, break a rule or go against an order from someone "in charge"? If so, under what conditions would this be justified?
 - d. Discuss specifically the role of drugs in this story. Why was the military giving drugs to the pilots? (Try to go beyond the obvious.) Explore the idea of drugs as "tools." (Pay particular attention to Colonel Demitry's statement.) Can tools be helpful and harmful at the same time? When using a drug as a tool, what are the dangers? How could you minimize the risk?
2. Have students think of a time when they choose to break a rule or go against what was expected of them because they felt it was wrong. Suggest they reflect on how it turned out and whether or not they would do it again. Why or why not? This could be a written or oral exercise.
3. Have students research the use of drugs in the military and prepare a brief report on the topic. They might look at both sanctioned and unsanctioned use and explore the reasons soldiers use drugs and what impact it has on them and others.

Drug literacy

Big ideas

- Drugs can be tremendously helpful and also very harmful
- As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage the drugs in our lives
- We can learn how to control drugs by examining human thinking through time, exploring stories from various cultures and listening to each other



Competencies

- Assess the complex ways in which drugs impact the health and well-being of individuals, communities and societies
- Recognize binary constructs (e.g., good vs bad) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like drug use
- Recognize how official responses to drugs may have less to do with the drug than with other factors
- Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs

For a complete look at the drug literacy competencies, as defined by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC, see: <http://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur/assets/docs/iminds/hs-pp-drug-curriculum.pdf>

Links to Curriculum

First Peoples' principles of learning

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions

Social Justice 12

Big ideas

- Social Justice Issues are interconnected
- The causes of social injustice are complex and have lasting impact on society

Competencies

- Use inquiry processes and skills to: ask; gather; interpret; and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions
- Assess and compare the significance of people, events, and developments at particular times and places, and examine what it reveals about social justice issues (significance)
- Ask questions and corroborate inferences about the content, origins, purposes and context of multiple sources and multiple perspectives (evidence)
- Determine and assess the long and short term causes and consequences of an event, legislative and judicial decision, development, policy, and movement (cause and consequence)
- Recognize implicit and explicit ethical judgments in a variety of sources (ethical judgment)
- Make reasoned ethical judgments about controversial actions in the past and present after considering the historical context and standards of right and wrong at the time (ethical judgment)