

'Support for Girls' Workshops

A Pilot programme: November 2018

Purpose: To identify key issues causing absenteeism and drop-out in school girls in Lawra, Upper West Ghana, in order to tackle these issues through tailored support.

Actions: A sample group of 34 JHS2 girls selected from an ATE supported all girls school. Only the oldest class in school was selected to keep the group size manageable and an all girls school was selected to encourage greater student participation for the pilot programme. Three 1-hour workshops were held during the last period of school. After school classes had been ruled out due to concerns from parents. A local, Dagaare speaking ATE consultant, Janet (profession: nurse) assisted in all three workshops.

Workshop 1: Introduction

- Introduction – to ATE, participating staff, workshop and support for girls.
- Energiser – ride the pony.
- Hand model activity – each girl has a piece of card, pencil and shares crayons a scissors with neighbours. They draw around their hand, write their name and age on the palm and the five things they love most about themselves on the fingers. They can then cut these out and present them to the class.
- Questionnaire.

Workshop 2: Menstruation

- Energiser – Simon says.
- Questionnaire.
- Explanation of what menstruation is biologically.
- Label the Uterus – a game where girls pick an anatomical label (vagina, ovary, etc.) out of the bag and have to guess where it goes on the diagram of a female sex organ.
- Debunk the myth – a true/false game. A statement is read out and the girls move from one side of the room to the other based on whether they believe the statement to be true. Each statement is debunked/explained.

Workshop 3: Future planning & evaluation

- Energiser – Head, shoulder, knees & toes.
- Path to profession – students pick a profession out of the bag, explain it to the class and we discuss what steps are taken to get there.
- Questionnaire.
- Re-useable sanitary towel making – Explanation of what a re-useable sanitary towel is and how to use it. With girls in groups of 4 or 5, each group was given a yard of cloth, needle and thread, chalk and a pamphlet of instructions on how to create a re-useable sanitary towel with two interchangeable liners.
- Distribution of hygiene packs – A thank you for their participation in the workshops. Each containing one ziplock bag, two pairs of underwear, one re-useable sanitary towel and two interchangeable liners.

After the final workshop was completed, Janet and ATE staff member debriefed and Janet made recommendations for improvements. These were mostly concerned with the language used on in the questionnaires.

Learnings and suggestions for improvement:

- 47% of the girls' parents are farmers.

- During the school holidays 34% worked or helped their parents at work, and 50% helped at home.
- 24% absented themselves from school because of illness, 24% because of needing to help parents, 24% had difficulty with the distance between home and school, 9% stated lack of learning materials as causing absences.
- 91% of the girls knew what menstruation was but only 25% of them could provide a good explanation.
- The majority of girls had started menstruating but only 22% knew what menstruation was at that time. This is a good indication that younger girls should be targeted in future workshops.
- 50% used a piece of cloth or a pad during their periods.
- 50% of the girls believed that calculating likelihood of conception by counting the days of cycle period was accurate.
- Almost half the girls (47%) stated that learning about menstruation was their favourite part of the workshops, with 66% saying they had learnt the most about menstruation and 88% saying they now felt more comfortable about menstruation because of their increased knowledge.
- Each questionnaire should be covered together as a class before students begin to complete them. This helps ensure everyone understands the questions in front of them to minimise time spent asking for help. Encourage students to ensure work is their own and not to worry about what their neighbour is writing. The questionnaires were used to gather data, encourage the girls to think reflectively and to promote self-expression.
- A whole workshop (3hours) should be dedicated to re-useable sanitary towel making. It was a valuable experience for the girls to work collaboratively, creatively and with problem solving tasks. Working through difficult subjects with your hands relaxes the pupils and helps them to engage more in the discussions. It is also a valuable skill; many of the girls said they wanted to make them for their parents/sisters. Manuals on how to make the re-useable sanitary towels were left with a female teacher in the office for students to borrow. A pair of scissors per girl/group is necessary.
- Invite female role models from the local community who can speak about their experiences achieving their professional goals and the steps they took to get there.
- More interactive activities are needed for future planning.
- Explore including additional topics. For example: women's rights, consent, sex education,, etc.
- Time should be carved out for creative activities to be included. The girls enjoyed these immensely and it helped increase participation in each workshop.
- Time keeping tasks were a challenge – it is suggested a stop watch/clock (something visible) is used to encourage the girls to complete their tasks within the time limit by planning accordingly.
- Volunteers to demonstrate or take part in activities were difficult to encourage in the beginning. It is important to explain that there is no right or wrong answer, but that we are learning together as a group. This made a big difference in the level of participation and for students wanting to volunteer.
- Having Janet present to help with translation (often repeating in English but in language the girls understood) and take part in the activities was immensely helpful. As a local woman, and a qualified and practising nurse, she was a good role model for the girls. The language used and understood by the students and Janet was different from the UK presenter.
- During workshops we asked that no men be present; no male consultants, ATE staff or teachers. This helped create a safe environment for discussing uncomfortable issues. I think in the future, workshops to ensure boys understand issues unique to girls so they can support them should be seriously considered.
- The participating students are all from an all-girl, specially selected government school, it is likely that they are more confident and supported than female students in mixed schools. It is likely that it will be much harder to achieve the same level of participation in the same amount of time with students from mixed schools.



Hand model activity



Completing questionnaires



Future planning



Label the uterus



Making re-useable sanitary towels



Debunk the myth



Re-useable sanitary towel making



Re-useable sanitary towel making



Students with their new Hygiene Packs



Contents of a Hygiene Pack



A student with her Hygiene Pack



A student showing off her new underwear