Case study

Innovative concepts to communicate science

DURING COVID-19

Contributor
Kid Scoop News

Country of implementation
Canada and United States of America

Start date of the initiative
March 2020

Track
Science and the media

Target audience
Children aged 6–14 years

Website
https://www.kidscoopnews.org/coronavirus-coloring-and-activity-booklet/

Kid Scoop News: Educating kids on COVID-19 using engaging activities

Summary of the initiative

Kid Scoop News on Coronavirus is a special edition of a news magazine for children published by a nonprofit organization, Kid Scoop News. The edition aims to explain the science behind the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the evidence-based preventive measures to children aged 6–14 years.

As part of the special edition, the team developed a 16-page colouring and activity booklet illustrating practical advice for children to pull through the pandemic. The booklet is available on the project website and was made available to newspapers in Canada and the United States of America, and other publishers, free-of-cost. Some newspapers published the booklet on their websites, others printed it in their newspapers. Some content was adapted from the booklet and published in the newspapers as individual features such as:

- a two-page summary that focused on the characteristics of the virus and why the precautions work;
- mask outlines for children to colour and display, promoting the act of wearing masks in public.

Newspapers that published the booklet were distributed to low-income areas through community service agencies to reduce information inequity, and consequently health inequity.

Above photo: A snapshot of Kid Scoop News Coronavirus Colouring and Activity booklet, available in English and Spanish. Credit: Eli Smith.

Context and relevance of the project

Kid Scoop News is a monthly newspaper for students in grades 2 to 8. The team prepares topical content in a child-friendly format, most of which takes a playful, interactive approach promoting health and well-being through games and puzzles. The material is shared with newspaper publishers for a licensing fee.

During early 2020, COVID-19 transmission was surging and consequently schools were closed. While children were directly affected by the public health and social measures implemented to limit transmission of the virus, they were mostly left out of official communication strategies. Kid Scoop News set out to change this by publishing a special issue directed at children's information needs during the pandemic. Drawing on existing relationships with newspapers and schools, the special edition provided children with practical advice on how to fight COVID-19.

School closures and lack of internet at home has especially deprived children living in low-income families from learning about COVID-19. To overcome this, the project distributed material to families for free through community service agencies or school-site food pick-up programmes.

Summary of the analysis

Innovation factors

The innovation of this project is the use of arts, creativity, and simple activities to engage children in understanding COVID-19. Evidence-informed messages are delivered in a recreational format, accessible online and offline, in English and Spanish.

Children are led to discover the topic in a playful way, e.g. by colouring in the silhouettes that are illustrated in the booklet, while exploring answers to their most common questions, such as:

- What is coronavirus?
- What if I contract it?
- How can I help to stop the spread of the virus?
- What can I do if I am worried?

The booklet also contains fill-in-the-blanks and crossword puzzles that are result-based exercises to induce retention of the children's learning.

A detailed section in the booklet discusses the importance of handwashing as a protective measure in an interesting and comprehensible manner. For example, children are encouraged to sing a song to measure the adequate duration of handwashing. A sample song is suggested, and children are asked to write their own songs and share with their family members. A similar section is available on the benefits of wearing a mask.

The booklet also includes activities that prompt children to express the challenging emotions they are experiencing during the pandemic. Some examples are:

- comparing scenarios at school, outdoors, and at home, before and since the pandemic began;
- drawing pictures of people they spend time with during the pandemic; and
- describing how they felt when they heard that schools would be closed.

These activities aim to open a dialogue with caregivers to help them understand children's struggles and offer empathy and support.

This initiative reflects that science communication is a shared responsibility and during emergencies, regular activities can be modified to serve as science translation tools.

Accuracy of scientific information

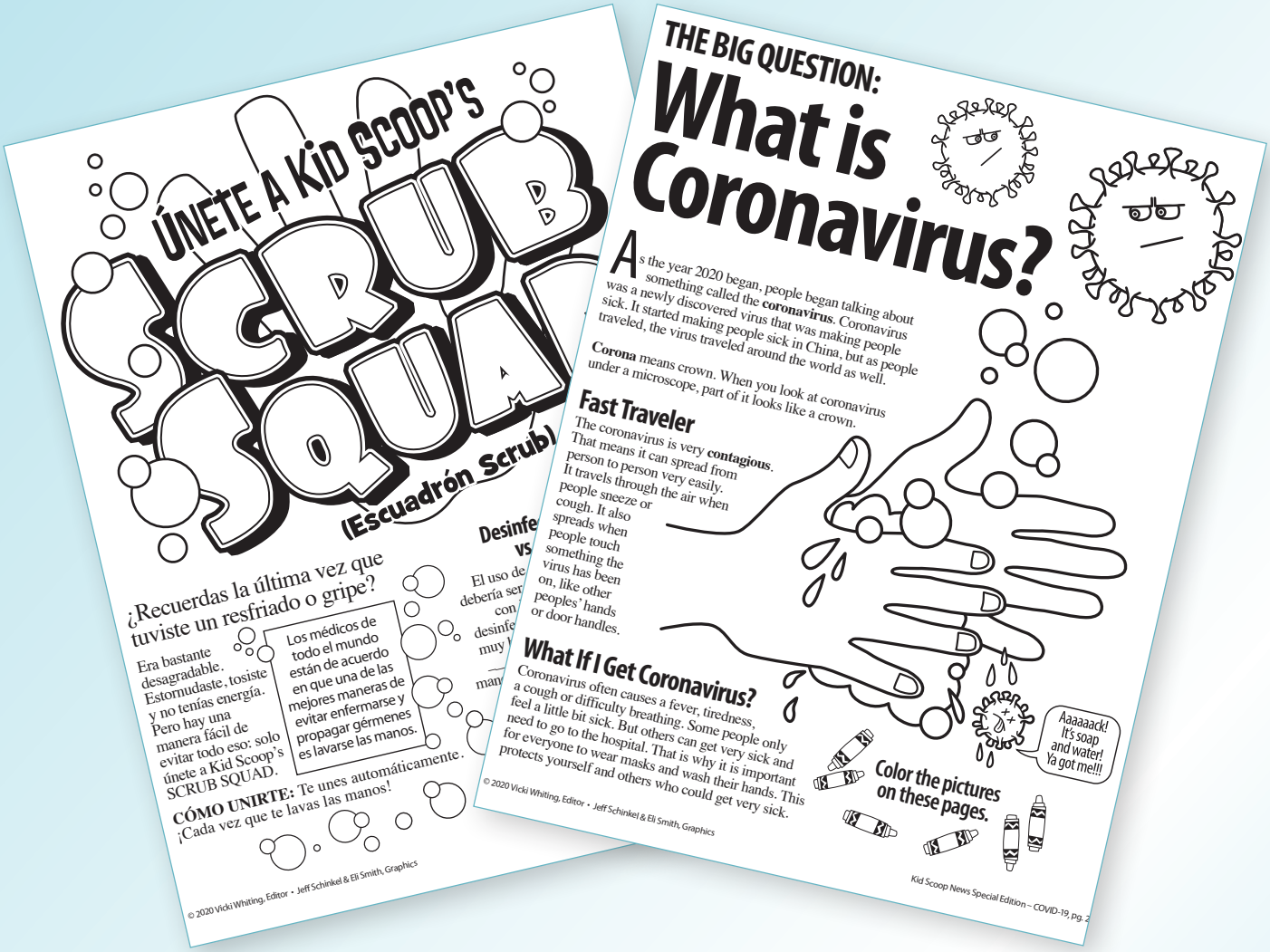
The team relied on official sources such as the World Health Organization, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and local health authorities to develop the content of the special edition.

Impact on knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of the target audience

To date, no formal evaluation of the impact on knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of the audience has been done.

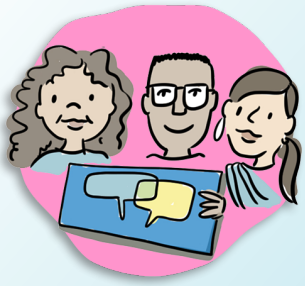
The project did not track the identity or number of publishers that downloaded the products. However, the team received requests from schools, districts, and community service agencies for the educational materials. This resulted in the distribution of 70 000 booklets in the San Francisco Bay Area. As part of Kid Scoop News' regular monthly publication, another 50 000 copies were disseminated with support from donors.

Children in California were colouring the mask outlines from newspaper publications and giving them to local stores to display in their windows.



Sample pages from Kid Scoop News Coronavirus Colouring and Activity booklet, available in English and Spanish.

Gender equality, equity and human rights considerations



The initiative fostered equity and human rights by distributing free, life-saving, health information to children in low-income areas during the pandemic. The language has been maintained at a cognitive and literacy level that is understandable by children of the target age group.

Free downloads of the two-page educational material in English and Spanish were offered to 300 newspapers that had a total circulation of 7.5 million copies.

The booklet was also distributed to indigenous populations such as the Navajo in Navajo Nation. Community leaders published the Kid Scoop News content in their newspaper, which is available in supermarkets and other locations of the tribal lands.

Limitations

An evaluation of the project would be valuable to gain in-depth insights on the empirical impact.

A potential way forward would be to continue the work with more special editions, potentially one on vaccination.

For future editions, it would be useful to include the references of the scientific information to increase transparency of sources and provide parents with a lead for seeking further advice.

Looking forward

The project, funded by charitable donations, continues to publish its monthly booklet of illustrated learning activities in science and health topics. Kid Scoop News aims to enhance the (health) literacy of children and young adolescents, especially those living in low-income and non-academic families.

There is scope to widen the reach of the project because of its printable format. The team could consider collaborating with translators and partners who could assist this step.

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