



Evaluation of **SAFE's *Animals & Us*** education programme

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Summary of evaluation findings

Evaluation purpose and approach

SAFE has been providing the *Animals & Us* educational resource, in a series of five textbooks plus digital materials, free to secondary schools throughout New Zealand (NZ) for 10 years. It now sought independent evaluation of the value, uses and impacts of the resources for teachers and students, to inform the future focus and development of an animals rights educational resource. Interview feedback was obtained from former and current students (n=23), teachers in a range of subject areas (n=22), school librarians (n=7), and teacher educators (n=7) from schools that varied in location, decile, single-sex/coed, and student ethnic composition. The interview findings were supplemented with data from surveys disseminated to teachers and students, together with SAFE records related to requests for the resources and prior internal evaluations of each textbook.

Acknowledgements

SAFE extends sincere thanks to everyone who has contributed their experiences, ideas and expertise to the evaluation. Your information has provided us with essential guidance for developing the *Animals & Us* programme for improved use by New Zealand teachers and students in the future.

Findings

Use and value of *Animals & Us*

- The *Animals and Us* resources, including website resources, have been used and appreciated widely across at least 170 secondary schools in NZ, including not only the four subject areas at which they were targeted but at least a dozen other secondary school subjects. Requests for copies of the textbooks originated roughly proportionately across geography, single sex and coed schools, and state, integrated and private schools, including faith-based schools, as well as a range of specific needs units, demonstrating their relevance across school years and types.
- Teachers and students were using a mix of the *Animals & Us* textbooks and SAFE's digital resources. The majority of teachers were overwhelmingly positive about their value in the secondary education context, and potentially at Years 7-8 and with special needs students. As a result, many teachers have been using them for a decade and are keen to know about new publications as they are produced.
- These resources have filled a gap in materials available for use in the secondary education curriculum, and are especially valued because they are immediately relevant to the NZ experience and viewed as produced by a credible organisation. The SAFE teaching resources are not duplicated in any organised way as a teaching resource for NZ schools and teachers, and thus are valued as a free and specifically NZ-focused resource.
- The SAFE resources were largely used in individualised or small group projects, only occasionally as a set class project with limited or no individual component, typically at Year 8-9.
- The resources were also being used by some teacher educators, though others had encountered them only recently. They saw a strong potential for promoting the resources through teacher education.

Impacts of using *Animals & Us*

- Students reacted emotionally to the SAFE resources and in particular enjoyed the ethical debates

with classmates and families that emerged.

- Teachers and students confirmed that the SAFE resources, as a NZ-focused resource, have a strong impact in students in developing awareness of animal rights (AR) together with both empathy and a sense of responsibility for animal welfare (AW).
- Teachers estimated that around half of each class with whom they use the SAFE resources develop and accept a concept of AR (versus AW), across age groups, and that around 10-15% of each class made some kind of overt commitment to AR, most commonly changing their diet to meat-free.
- Virtually all students undertook some kinds of actions after exposure to the resources, ranging from passive to active/public; for most these were relatively 'quiet' actions, often using social media to spread messages and broadcast awareness. Public action tended to occur only when it was built into the student's assessment. However there is a potential for much more overt action and behaviour change through those actions, with students wanting to get involved more than they do.
- Impacts of all kinds were most likely if the teacher had incorporated those changes as conscious goals of using the resources and then prompted, promoted or actively facilitated new behaviour.
- Impacts on teachers depended on the extent of their use of the resources, with those newly acquainted experiencing similar reactions to those of students, while others experienced a renewed commitment each time they used the resources. All teachers achieved a lot of satisfaction from using the resources.

Uptake, distribution and promotion

- Uptake depended on the alignment of the resources with the current curriculum, as interpreted by HoDs. Teachers with a strong AR commitment managed to 'fit' AR topics into a broad range of assessments; teachers without that commitment were less likely to do so.
- Key informants believed that the resources needed significantly increased and more strategic promotion in order to achieve optimal usefulness.
- Distribution and promotion have been impeded by sending textbooks mainly to a single source within each school hitherto. Any reliance on internal distribution needs to be replaced by stronger promotion of the resources by SAFE. A range of pathways was suggested through which effective promotion can occur, with support from teachers, librarians, teacher educators and students who were keen to be 'ambassadors' for the resources.
- Several teachers and student identified a gap currently in the coverage of cultural aspects of AW, AR and animal-human relations and believed that enhanced coverage could promote greater uptake and utility of the resources by both teachers and students.
- Promotion to students, in particular encouragement to take action and change behaviour, needs to occur through the channels that teens and young adults prefer at the given moment, which is in constant flux. Current preferred platforms are SnapChat, Instagram and, to a lesser extent for younger teens, Facebook.

Medium

- The trend is irrevocably towards digital teaching, so that, to be used well in the future, the SAFE resources need to all be available in downloadable and 'editable' PDFs. The resource generally needs to have a strong search engine.
- New materials should be published in small modular formats for easy download, printing or

sending to students via digital classrooms, and for sharing of the resources with colleagues via online teaching resource networks.

- Teachers and librarians were still keen to have print copy available as a teacher-only resource, but provided only to a limited audience, to avoid waste.
- Short videos are seen now as an essential teaching resource in most subjects, and for teacher education. SAFE was strongly encouraged to incorporate short videos and You Tube into its repertoire and library.
- AR speakers were highlighted by students as having made the strongest permanent impact on changing their beliefs, attitudes and behaviour.

Summary and suggestions for resource development

The *Animals & Us* and other animal rights resources produced by SAFE are highly valued by teacher who support animal welfare and want to include animal rights topics in their teaching. The paper and digital materials, and speakers, were widely appreciated by students and made some level of impact on the large majority of students who engaged with them.

The key suggestions for improving the effectiveness and reach of the resources were to:

- Update the older resources and publish them in a digital resource
- Provide resources that are targeted at a lower reading level than till now, to cater for varying literacy levels
- Promote all of the existing and new resources more assertively, through a range of vehicles
- Remain vigilant to developments in the national education curriculum, and demonstrate to teachers, and especially to HoDs, how the resources can be tailored to fit the current curriculum
- Focus on some new topics not previously covered in the textbooks, and demonstrate ways in which the existing and new resources can be aligned with integrated and interdisciplinary learning approaches and with the current priority global themes of climate change, biodiversity and species depletion, and sustainability.

Other suggestions for increasing uptake and use were to expand the currently informal resource service by ‘packaging’ selected materials and resources around selected project topics aligned with the NZ curriculum at a given time, reflecting curriculum developments, so that these ‘packages’ of materials will always be curriculum-relevant. Teachers suggested that such packages could be shared through online teaching resource networks.