

Efficacy of the drug abuse resistance education (d.a.r.e.) program



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In the 1983 the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) worked together to create a drug education program for elementary school children after recognizing that there were few drug prevention curricula available for school-age children. The partnership created one of the first drug curriculums designed to be delivered to elementary school children and taught the negative effects of specific drugs. The Drug Abuse Resistance Education Program or D. A. R. E. Program was a 17 lesson curriculum and was based upon prevailing prevention science at the time (The History of D. A. R. E., n. d.).

The D. A. R. E. Program was unique in that it was designed to be delivered to students using uniformed police officers in the classroom. Certified D. A. R. E. Officers receive 80-hours of training specific to the D. A. R. E. curriculum as well as methods of instruction and classroom management. Officers are carefully selected by their agencies and must be able to show an demonstrated ability to interact with children, have oral and written communication skills that are adaptable to age-specific audiences, and be an exemplary role model in both formal and informal situations to name a few (D. A. R. E., n. d.). Over the next decade the D. A. R. E. Program grew from its roots in the LAUSD to a largescale nationwide program, with LAPD D. A. R. E. officers working to instruct police officers across the country in the delivery of the program (The History of D. A. R. E., n. d.).

The curriculum grew over the years for the basic elementary school curricula to a full curriculum that covered all ages from kindergarten through high school. It was also modified from a lecture based non-interactive program to a curriculum that was interactive and delivered through facilitation instead of

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lecture. A 2001 rewrite of the program was funded by a \$13.6 million grant provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (West & O'Neal, 2004).

Students now work in small interactive learning groups guided by the D. A. R. E. Officer in activities, discussions, and role play. While updates to the D. A. R. E. curriculum maintained their substance abuse message, a focus on positive decision making and the inclusion of a D. A. R. E. Decision Making Model became a central part of the program. This decision making model allows students to their own way of positively addressing high-risk situations in all facets of their lives (The History of D. A. R. E., n. d.).

The rapid expansion of school-based drug education programs began following President Regan's "War on Drugs" campaign. Then the 1989 Drug Free Schools and Community Act was passed which outlawed drug use and possession in schools. These programs began a requirement that schools receiving federal funds include drug related education programs in their curriculum (Wysong & Wright, 1994). As a result, by 1990 there were over 100 school-based drug curriculums being promoted. D. A. R. E. was and still is the most common drug prevention curriculum in the United States. According to their website, D. A. R. E. is now being implemented in 75 percent of our nation's school districts and in more than 52 countries around the world (The History of D. A. R. E., n. d.).

While the D. A. R. E. program is widely utilized, some remain critical of the effectiveness of the program. When researching the efficacy of the program, it was found that there are many studies with as many varying results. It

was also found that perceptions and user satisfaction data is available in addition to effectiveness.

A study conducted by Steven L. West Ph. D. and Keri K. O'Neal Ph. D. looked at many peer reviewed articles for their study. The research they included in their study was eventually refined to a list of 11 studies that all included a control or comparison group and both preintervention and post intervention assessments of at least 1 of 3 variables: alcohol use, illicit drug use, and tobacco use (West & O'Neal, 2004).

The results of their study stated that there were only marginally better outcomes for individuals participating in D. A. R. E relative to participants in control conditions (West & O'Neal, 2004). Six reports that they looked at which indicated that D. A. R. E had more positive effects were all from studies that were very small considered to other.

Their overall findings are that D. A. R. E is ineffective and although its effectiveness in preventing substance abuse has been called into question, its application in our nation's schools remains extensive (West & O'Neal, 2004). They go on to state in the conclusion that " given the tremendous expenditures in time and money involved with D. A. R. E, it would appear that continued efforts should focus on other techniques and programs that might produce more substantial effects" and " that D. A. R. E was minimally effective during the follow-up periods that would place its participants in the very age groups targeted" (West & O'Neal, 2004).

West & O'Neal state that experimentation of alcohol and other drugs reaches a peak during adolescence or young adulthood and decreases in the years
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following. They believe that based on this information that “ ideally individuals enrolled in D. A. R. E would report limited to no use during their adolescent or young adult years” (West & O’Neal, 2004). Their study, as well as almost all published studies, included information from research which refer to the “ old” D. A. R. E. curriculum prior to being revamped in 2001.

Another study I looked at studied parent perceptions of the D. A. R. E. program. The study which was conducted in 2002, looked at responses from 420 parents of fifth and sixth-grade students enrolled in D. A. R. E. in a Midwestern county to determine their perceptions of the program (Lucas, 2008). The study was conducted using self-administered anonymous surveys that were distributed to the parents of the students by the D. A. R. E. officers who were teaching the students at the time. The sample contained parents in urban and suburban areas of a metropolitan area with a population of about 655, 000 (Lucas, 2008). The survey instrument was based on a 5-point Likert scale and asked parents to indicate in what ways their child’s behavior or attitude has changed as a result of participating in D. A. R. E.

While this survey did not assess the actual effects of the D. A. R. E. program, it did look at the perceived effects of the program with regards to knowledge, attitude, and behavior. What the survey found was that the most perceived program impact was with respect to the child’s improved perception of police officers, and an improved understanding and ability to resist drugs (Lucas, 2008). Parents of this survey stated they did not see an impact on school attendance or performance, but parent did report having an increased awareness of substance abuse problems themselves and increased conversation about drug use with their children as a result of the <https://assignbuster.com/efficacy-of-the-drug-abuse-resistance-education-dare-program/>

D. A. R. E. program. The survey concluded that parents valued the program and perceived it to be a valuable use of classroom time. It also concluded that drug knowledge was increased, which is the desired effect of the curriculum.

Along the same lines, the United States Department of Justice issued a National Institute of Justice Update in 1994 entitled the “ The D. A. R. E. program: A Review of Prevalence, User Satisfaction, and Effectiveness. The publication showed that support for The D. A. R. E. program, is strong, as is user satisfaction (National Institute of Justice, 1994). Interestingly, it went on to look at the program and its perception by different races. It stated that the D. A. R. E program appeals to students irrespective of race. Student receptivity to D. A. R. E was rated higher than other programs, but coordinators in districts with a large population of minority students were even more likely than those districts serving predominantly white students to rate students’ receptivity to D. A. R. E as very high (National Institute of Justice, 1994).

The publication went on to look at data regarding D. A. R. E and showed that it is best at increasing students’ knowledge about substance abuse and enhancing social skills (National Institute of Justice, 1994). It showed that the effect of D. A. R. E on attitudes toward drugs and the police was more modest. It also found that the effect on fifth and sixth graders regarding substance abuse were small, but the findings on tobacco use for this age group were “ statistically significant” (National Institute of Justice, 1994).

This publication dated in 1994 found that the D. A. R. E method of delivery could benefit from a more interactive approach. Future updates to the D. A. R. E. curriculum, such as the 2001 rewrite, created a more interactive delivery method.

A 2002 master's thesis by James Fisher looked at the perceptions of teachers, principals, and school resource officers. While not peer reviewed, this provided interesting insight into how the D. A. R. E. program is viewed by the stakeholders responsible for presenting the curriculum, as well as educators who are actively involved in the implementation of D. A. R. E.

Fisher used interviews of sixteen teachers, 9 school principals, and seven school resource officers (SROs). While the previous study showed a positive perception of the D. A. R. E program, Fisher eventually concluded that the D. A. R. E program should be withdrawn and replaced with an entirely new drug and violence prevention program and curriculum specific to community realities and needs (Fisher, 2002).

Fisher reviewed and studied the curriculum, delivery, and efficacy of the D. A. R. E program. The interviewees, for the most part, all responded favorably to the curriculum. Some SROs stated they thought the program was too “crammed” and that there were too many lessons. Teachers all responded favorably, and all but 2 principals were in favor of the program. Of the two principals not in favor, one stated that they doubted the efficacy of the program questioning whether the students internalized the lessons even though they “spout off this, this, and this” (Fisher, 2002). Fisher states that nearly 94% of the sample regarded the program content favorable,

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however, 23% still had some concerns about the curricular content, even though they responded overall favorably.

When studying delivery, Fisher found that all of his respondents stated that the delivery varied in terms of instructor personality, even though the curriculum was uniform in terms of content. Teachers overall rated the delivery as “ good” based on the quality of the uniformed officers presenting the material. While designed to be presented uniformly and consistently, one teacher stated that she had experience with two officers, and the presentation was completely different between the two. While she was the only respondent in Fisher’s study to indicate this, I have personally experienced different instructors and can conclude that the difference in delivery can create an entirely different program utilizing the same standard curriculum.

When it comes to efficacy, principals indicated that “ there is nothing special about D. A. R. E. and any program deemed effective would be fine as well” (Fisher, 2002). He also found that SROs may become overly critical or overly protective of the program because they have become so close to it. Furthermore, he found that teachers may be more positive about D. A. R. E. because of their limited role in delivering the program.

When looking at the overall favorability of the D. A. R. E. program, he found that nearly 88% of his respondents were in favor of retaining the program. This broke down to 100% of teachers, 86% of SROs, and 67% of principals proving that “ D. A. R. E. has a synergy far exceeding the programs limitations” (Fisher, 2002).

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Fisher's statement that the program is ineffective is based on his finding that the majority of literature suggests that D. A. R. E. has a limited effect upon stopping student drug use, particularly as time passes. However, there is a greater efficacy with respect to student attitudes and awareness about drugs as a result of exposure to the D. A. R. E. program (Fisher, 2002).

Fisher points out six key points about D. A. R. E. based on his study and the literature examined. 1) D. A. R. E. has a limited effect on reducing student drug use, 2) D. A. R. E. has greater efficacy with respect to student attitudes towards awareness of drugs, 3) A more flexible program than the current D. A. R. E. program is desirable, 4) A more comprehensive program is desirable, 5) Direct parental involvement is desirable but absent, and 6) D. A. R. E. is extremely popular (Fisher, 2002).

Most of these studies and the included literature refer to early adaptations of the D. A. R. E. program. In 2017 D. A. R. E. America released an updated elementary school curriculum called "Keepin It Real". This curriculum continued using facilitation as the method of delivery by D. A. R. E. Officers and included the use of videos to begin and end each lesson. This new curriculum was dismissed by D. A. R. E. New Jersey and the New Jersey Association of Superintendent of Schools because the curriculum was not evidence based or scientifically tested and removed the lesson on marijuana. D. A. R. E America stated that the topic of marijuana should be addressed on the local level due to changes in legislation regarding marijuana across the country. A stand-alone marijuana lesson was still provided for districts who wished to implement the lesson.

D. A. R. E. New Jersey became involved in litigation with D. A. R. E. America and eventually disbanded. Law enforcement Against Drugs (L. E. A. D.) was formed in New Jersey and provided the Too Good for Drugs curriculum by the Mendez Foundation.

While the Too Good for Drugs curriculum is evidence based, it is through personal experience that I have found the curriculum to not engage the students. The materials are lackluster and the lessons do not capture the attention of the students. Based on this observation, one has to wonder if Too Good for Drugs will have the same effect on student attitudes and awareness about drugs that D. A. R. E. has been shown to have.

When looking at the research, I believe the most important part of any curriculum is the ability of that curriculum to capture the interest and attention of the students. Without this engagement, the curriculum, evidence based and scientifically tested or not, will be ineffective.

Ultimately the success of D. A. R. E. appears to rest on the officer presentation the program, and his or her ability to connect with the students and create a lasting bond. That bond is what will cause the students to reflect on the lessons during a critical decision period, and hopefully make a good decision based on lessons learned. This highlights the importance of D. A. R. E. officer selection and training.

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