A 14-month research project suggests that the DARE drugs education resource may be failing in some of its most important aims

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Teaching young people how to say No

Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) was developed by the Los Angeles Police Dept. in 1984; it is the most widely disseminated drug education programme in the USA, and has also been used in primary schools in the UK.

Nottinghamshire Constabulary has invested heavily in DARE, with the aim of implementing it in all the primary schools in the county. In 1995-6 an evaluation of the programme took place within a Mansfield middle school, the aim being to discover if the children were 'able to articulate attitudes and behaviours which are consistent with the emphasis of DARE'.

Discovering if the children were ‘able to articulate attitudes and behaviours which are consistent with the emphasis of DARE’.

DARE and its aims

DARE has two basic aims:
• To foster antipathy towards the use of drugs.
• To help pupils resist pressure to use drugs against their will.

In this sense, DARE is not altogether different from a plethora of school-based drug education programmes within the UK. Where it is different, however, is that it is delivered within a classroom (not to groups) by a uniformed police officer. The input is spread over 17 weekly one-hour sessions.

The research plan

The evaluation took the following form:
1. Three Year 6 classes (10-11 year olds), totalling 100 children, were involved. No children from black or minority ethnic communities took part.
2. Before the course began, the children all completed a ‘draw and write’ questionnaire that had been used in a previous evaluation.
3. The same questionnaire was completed again a week after the course, by 86% of the pupils.
4. Four months after the course ended, 83% of the children completed a structured attitude questionnaire.
5. Two weeks after that, 82% of the children were invited to take part in a series of group discussions.
6. Four months later still, a stratified random sample of 12 pupils were selected and interviewed individually. The interviews were tape-recorded and lasted for about 25 minutes.

What is a drug?

To find out what the children included under the heading of “drugs”, the questionnaire asked them to write down the items they might expect to find inside a bag labelled “drugs” that somebody had dropped.

The pre- and post-test results showed some clear differences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug</th>
<th>Pre (%)</th>
<th>Post (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cigarettes</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crack cocaine</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecstasy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Needles &amp; syringes)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Neither the boys nor the girls considered it likely that they would be offered drugs.

Drug dealers, in the view of this group, were smart and well-off — unlike the users.

Dealers and users

Drug dealers, in the view of this group, were smart and well-off — unlike the users. However, within the individual interviews it emerged that girls tended to visualise users as ‘normal’ people, while the boys tended to picture them as ‘mucky’, skinhead, tattooed, or wearing dark, ripped clothing. Overwhelmingly, drug users assumed a demeaning aspect for this male cohort:

They wear dark clothes and creep up on people.

The relationship of drugs with crime was sustained throughout the evaluation.

Dealing with drug offers

This was the main focus of attention during the group discussions and the individual interviews. How did these young people think they would respond if someone came up and offered them drugs? The responses showed that they expected the dealer to be older, stronger, and more difficult to resist than someone of their own age. Both boys and girls predicted that they would feel shock, fear, anger or confusion. Several of the girls’ groups also expected to feel pressure, panic, and even paralysis (expressed as ‘freezing’ or ‘going cold’). Here are some extracts from the boys’ group discussions:

I don’t know what to think. I’d feel like I just didn’t know what I’d done.

I’d feel confused, I’d just want to scream and run.

The girls’ comments included:

I would want to get away from the situation, wish I was somewhere else.

I’d feel like crying and running away.

I’d feel really upset and would not know what to do.

Several of the groups gave the impression that they might accept the drug just in order to get out of the situation.

Drugs and the ‘peer group’

Drug use by friends within places such as the school premises was judged as ‘stupid’ or ‘idiotic’ rather than criminal. There is a clear distinction between the threatening, external world of drugs and drug users and the use of drugs by people closer to the cohort’s frame of experience:

The kids and that, they just simply like what they are like.

They’re not hooked or anything, they’re just trying it.

The effect of peer-group pressure on young people to accept drugs was an important part of the study, on two counts:

The DARE curriculum pays particular attention to peer pressure.

Young people are, statistically, more likely to obtain drugs from those they know or are acquainted with.

The boys emphasised the importance of maintaining credibility with their peers. This led to them suggesting a range of responses to drug offers that did not fit in with the stated objectives of DARE. They included:

If a friend has been offered drugs, paying them to refuse.

Alternatively, offering to buy their friend a gift or do some other favour if they refuse.

Buying the drugs and offering to keep them safe; secretly handing them over to the police, and then telling the person that they have been lost.

Buying the drugs, pretending that they were for other friends.

These responses, showing how important it is to boys to maintain credibility with their friends, need to be taken into account by DARE workers. They may need to re-orient the curriculum and mode of delivery to address the issue more effectively.

The girls, in comparison, showed little discernible regard for the maintenance of ‘peer credibility’, even though they were equally aware of the pressures this could bring. To them, the need to avoid becoming involved with drugs was of paramount importance. In some cases this was allied with a similar concern for their friends.

It was noticed that the presence of girls appeared to strengthen the boys’ belief in their ability to refuse drugs in the presence of their peers, while the girls’ determination to refuse drugs in any circumstances seemed to be weakened in the presence of boys.

In summary

1. Most of the young people, especially the boys, tended to stereotype drug users and dealers as belonging to an older and remote group, and felt that drugs were unlikely to affect them personally. However, it must also be acknowledged that:

• The vast majority of young people obtain drugs in the first instance from friends or acquaintances.

• Drugs are accessed to a significant minority of young people in Year 6.

2. Teenagers, seen as a more likely source of drug offers than their contemporaries, were generally viewed with trepidation.

• The DARE curriculum pays particular attention to peer pressure.

• Young people are, statistically, more likely to obtain drugs from those they know or are acquainted with.

• The boys emphasised the importance of maintaining credibility with their peers.

3. The group expressed a range of ways of saying, ‘No’, and seemed to be extremely confident that they could avoid accepting drugs when they were on familiar ground and dealing with people of their own age. This even extended to offers within their peer group.

4. However, not all the ‘refusal’ strategies...
Books received

Terry Brown: Developing a Drug Education Policy: A Guide for schools. "The book focuses on the development and maintenance of the school's policy on drugs. The book offers background information on the legislation and initiatives that have shaped current approaches to drug education, then goes on to explore how a policy should be developed consensually with teachers, parents, governors and pupils." Courtservice Publications, Westbury, Suffolk. 85pp, £12.95.

Lindsay Heonoghan & Stephen Yates: Developing Learning in RE at Key Stage 3. This is a slim spiral-bound book full of practical teaching ideas, focused on the skills and attitudes outlined in the SCA Model syllabus. The teaching notes accompanying each of the 28 lesson ideas have clearly-set-out aims, and include suggestions for group work, pair work and individual work. Drama and role play are encouraged, as well as written and discursive contributions on the part of the students. A copyright-free worksheet materia is provided for each lesson, with amusing illustrations and thought-provoking and stimulating tasks for the students to work on. The notes provide extension activities for those who wish to pursue the subject further, some take-home assignments, as well as suggestions for simplifying the material for less-able students. Sections on preparation and classroom management make organisation as easy as possible for the busy teacher. Attaching the subject from a multi-fact angle, the worksheets encourage the development of skills and processes such as investigation, reflection, interpretation, empathy and application. Attitudes covered include commitment, fairness and enquiry. Subjects range from the nature of belief and pilgrimage to marriage, immigration and suffering, thus making the book extremely useful for teachers of English and PSHE as well as RE. This book represents a very good value, and I don't see it sitting unused on the staffroom bookshelf for very long at all! The Catholic Press, 57pp. £19.95. (See Shropshire, Media Library, School of Education, University of Exeter.)

Ruth Joyce & Rod Grant: Smack or Sympathy: Exploring drug issues in schools. This would be a valuable supplement to Understanding Drugs (Emmett & Nico) which I reviewed in E&H 5/1. The authors leave aside the details of individual drugs and discuss the pressures and constraints on pupils, parents, schools and others in considering drug use. A nice touch is the use of little 'vox pop' speech bubbles, which give a perspective of a young person's point of view. 'Key messages for the reader are reinforced, and there are suggestions for exercises to be carried out with teaching colleagues in drawing up policy or curriculum documents. Forbes Publications, London. 77pp. £6.95. (David Regis, SHEU.)

Nigel Mellor: Attention-seeking: a practical solution for the classroom. As the title suggests the main thrust of this book is to provide the classroom teacher with strategies for 'supporting the child who presents attention-seeking behaviour in class' (p4). This pragmatic approach is reflected in the format of the book in which Part I (Practical Steps) deals with the practical management of the child and makes up the main body of the book, before reviewing attention-seeking from an academic and research viewpoint in Part II (The Context).

To encourage any reader who has experienced an attention-seeking child within their classroom, the author recognises through the words of one teacher the stress that this can cause:

I start off feeling compassionate, I'd like to spend more time with him, then frustrated, then angry. He drains all the compassion from me. I feel like screaming, I feel like it's my fault. I'm just drained at the end of it. (p6)

What did, though, come as a challenge to the reviewer was the claim that the need for change does not lie in the first instance with the child, but with those adults who come into contact with it:

The need for change lies with the adults. We cannot rely on counselling the child to achieve a solution. (p13)

If the reader can progress past this declaration then what follows quickly begins to make sense as the dynamics of attention-seeking are explored. The fundamental key to this circle of teacher, pupil interaction is the setting of new targets (agreed with others such as the child itself, its parents, or Special Needs Co-ordinator) to more positively into a pattern of acceptable behaviour that enables the child to feel needed and valued.

As would be hoped for in this difficult area, the author is careful to highlight possible pitfalls, make suggestions for their avoidance, and offer an abundance of commonsense.

Given the pressure of classroom life, a successful programme has to be simple. Keep it well within the limits of what you think you can manage. (p24)

Case studies are always of interest to the practitioner. This book describes how the suggested programme has been implemented in very different settings, and the three main examples illustrate the flexibility of the approach. They show how 'ordinary' teachers managed to make some impact while still at the same time serving the rest of their class.

It is not...the argument of the book that seeking attention-seeking will solve all ills. But there exist many young people whose relationships and quality of life can be changed, sometimes dramatically, by addressing the issue of attention-seeking directly. (p74)

The book is aimed at teachers of both primary and secondary children, although some of the visual material may be more orientated towards the primary sector. I would recommend this book especially to any teacher who may, for the first time, be facing up to the practical management of the attention-seeking child within their classroom.