



Gang Awareness Training Education Program:

Effectiveness and Impact.

Research completed by the Study Group INI-Con



A 10 year study into impact and effectiveness of the GATE curriculum

The Gang Awareness Training Education program is in the process of conducting a 10-year longitudinal evaluation, showing that the G.A.T.E. program has positive effects on adolescent's attitudes and risk factors involving delinquency and a there is evidence that there is a reduction in gang involvement and delinquent behavior. There is further research being conducted on this information to further refine and develop the curriculum to have a greater impact. The G.A.T.E. curriculum is a living breathing program, lesson plans are constantly being evaluated for effectiveness.

What is GATE?

G.A.T.E. is a school based prevention and intervention program. Unlike other prevention programs, in which they target at-risk youths or those already involved with gangs, G.A.T.E. targets the entire school. G.A.T.E. takes this level of approach one step farther, rather than limiting the instruction to just one or two grade levels, G.A.T.E. developed three distinct programs targeting, elementary school, middle school and high school aged youth. G.A.T.E. went an additional step farther, in enlisting partners in the community as well as local law enforcement to help direct and steer at-risk youth who are in the instructional portion of the program to social services, mentoring programs and peer services in the effort to replace the issues that gang's address in youth people today.

The G.A.T.E. program is aimed at students and seeks to:

- To value decisions they make and to understand the dangers of joining a gang.
- To respect laws and rules prohibiting gangs
- To educate about the dangers of drugs and remaining drug free.
- To recognized and resist pressures of gangs.
- To promote positive activities which reinforce gang free elements of student life.
- To promote the reduction of gun violence and the proliferation of acts of violence committed with weapons.
- To address the dangers surrounding school related violence.

These 6 objectives are addressed through 8 hours of curriculum taught in schools by law enforcement officers or specially trained prevention instructors. The instructors teach students about goal settings, resisting peer pressure, peacefully resolving conflicts, reaching out to adults for help, reducing stress and understanding they way that gangs impact their quality of life.



How do you know if the program is effective?

G.A.T.E. has shown an immediate impact on gang activity in and around school in which the program has been implemented. The survey's that are administered are given to all grade levels starting at 5th grade and continuing until 12th grade. Currently the results have shown that in grades 5th through 8th there has been an effect on several key risk factors including; risk taking behavior, negative image of gangs, relationships with adults and conflict resolution amongst peers. Much of the results can be attributed to G.A.T.E.'s on going encouragement in pro-social activities, which guide youths away from interaction with delinquent peers and toward involvement with those who society considers acceptable behavior.



GATE Students conducting community service project

G.A.T.E. also works to educate youth about dangers of specific drugs in their home communities, providing resources, practical knowledge and general awareness. Instructors also work through specialized surveys at targeted grade levels to identify exposure to A.T.O.D. (alcohol, tobacco and other drugs), age of onset and access to them. This provides valuable data for instructors to alter program content with the goal of impacting the affects of A.T.O.D. as early as possible.

G.A.T.E. also addresses violence and violence as a result of bullying through a series of lesson plans

which provide skills in dealing with bullying, reaching out to mentors and trusted adults. In addition the program provides all students with additional skills to assist those students who are targets of bullies. This third party form of intervention reduces the risk to both the target of the bully and the bully and provides the target an opportunity to reach out to others for help and guidance in difficult situation, in which they previously thought they might be alone.



Significant findings emerged as a result of research in comparison to those with who were non-participants. The immediate result after one year of program delivery includes:

- 25-percent reduction in property crimes particularly juvenile shoplifting.
- 11-percent lower level of victimization over the previous 4 year results.
- 17-percent reduction of alcohol use from grade 7 to grade 8.
- 6-percent difference in risk taking behavior
- 5-percent difference in associating with peers involved in pro-social activities.

When evaluating this brief snapshot of risk-focused delinquency prevention, the results suggest that negative behaviors can be impacted in the future and therefore are preventable. G.A.T.E. risk-focused delinquency approach uses extensive research in which identified risk factors impacting crime, violence among individuals, families and peer groups, in or near communities and schools.



Results after a four-year program presentation included:

- 9-percent reduction in juvenile shoplifting.
- 12-percent reduction of alcohol use through grade 9.
- 9-percent reduction of gang related crimes through grade 9.

In using this method the program is focused on the common risk factors. Results follow with research on protective factors which buffer children from becoming delinquent and contribute to healthy behaviors.¹

Research

A series of studies were combined to help identify the impact of the G.A.T.E. program, a cross-sectional study, and longitudinal study. While the results from the longitudinal study are not complete as of yet the cross-sectional results show numerous areas of reduction including in the areas of drug use, year of onset, crime and victimization and gang activity and delinquency. G.A.T.E. from its first use has surveyed their students to determine factors that impact positive or negative behaviors.



Perceptions of G.A.T.E.

Through parent, educator and instructor surveys reveals positive attitudes toward G.A.T.E. Almost all parents agreed that police officers belong in schools and make good instructors if they are properly trained. Parents also were specific in stating that officers or preventionists must have a vested interest in the school that they are working with. Educators agree that the curriculum is age appropriate and that the programs lessons address the problems facing middle school students. All of the instructors have expressed overwhelming support of the program, stating that the programs flexibility, its appropriate lesson plans have improved problems in their home communities, improved relationships in school and the community and the community as a whole.

The G.A.T.E. program shows positive results: Including educating youths about the dangers of drugs, violence and gangs. The program promoted positive relationships with youths and the instructors which carried far beyond the period of instruction. The program did have an impact on gang membership and future delinquent behavior. It was based in part on this result that G.A.T.E. implemented the elementary grade program and the high school level program to continue the impact into the high school years.



Other programs in comparison use single grade level programs not exceeded nine or ten hours cannot have long impact in areas that are desirable, particularly gang involvement, delinquent behavior or drug use. Other programs such as G.R.E.A.T. produced results that had educational benefits and improved

¹ Smith, C.; Lizotte, A.J.; Thornberry, T.P.; and Krohn, M.D. Resilient youth: Identifying factors that prevent high-risk youth from engaging in delinquency and drug use. In: Hagan, J., ed. *Delinquency and Disrepute in the Life Course*. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1995, pp. 217-247.

police relations they had little or no impact on gang membership or future delinquent behavior. ² G.A.T.E. curriculum which if used over the prescribed grade levels will have over 70 hours of instruction from kindergarten into high school. This prolonged approach coinciding with the intervention component of the program goes along way to impacting the effects of gangs, drugs and violence in any community.

How does the program differ from similar programs?



The G.A.T.E. program has several differences than similar drug, gang or violence prevention programs. First, G.A.T.E. is designed to be used from elementary school through high school. By having the program formatted in this manner it provides maximum impact to the students over a prolonged period of time. Providing needed information about drugs, anti-social behavior, gangs and violence to America's young people. Second, the G.A.T.E. program re-evaluates each

lesson annually, relying on instructor feedback, school feedback, student surveys and latest research on what really works with pre-teens and teenagers in the area of prevention. Adaptability and flexibility are paramount in any program, G.A.T.E.'s ability to allow instructors to "flex" lesson plans, during what is referred to as "teachable moments" are paramount to impacting students at key moments. Other programs require a strict adherence to their lesson plan layout and the instructors are specifically restricted from teaching in that manner. Lastly, G.A.T.E.'s strong background in intervention also places it ahead of other programs. Our melding of prevention and intervention into a curriculum means, that when teachers, instructors, students, school staff and parents observe an issue arise in a youth. The instructor will follow through and help steer the "at-risk" youth to needed social services, risk prevention, or other services to mitigate a problem before it becomes too late.

Because G.A.T.E. covers all three types of major risk issues: drugs, gangs and violence it places the G.A.T.E program above many other programs that only seek to address one area of risk. Thus making the maximum use of available time in an already crowded time crunched school day.

High School Curriculum

The G.A.T.E. program quickly recognized a need for program delivery in the upper grade system, particularly high school. As with all schools, the need to deliver required classes and meet state standardized testing requirements make program implementation problematic. However, after a period of time a picture emerged regarding as to how can a prevention specialist adequately. Because of the limitations required by almost all educational institutions delivery would have to be made with maximum impact in mind, with limited time exposure as a consideration. The result of the research and the aforementioned observations the RADICAL program was developed.

² Esbensen, Finn-Aage, "Evaluating G.R.E.A.T.: A school-based gang prevention program, US Department of Justice, Officer of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, Research for Policy June 2004.

The RADICAL program was designed to deliver a series of class room lectures and in class exercises for High School grade students on key topics that impact teens at this stage of their development. The lesson plans are PowerPoint based with using a social norms perspective. The result is that 12 lesson plans get delivered as needed and available time and space allow. In some cases not all lesson plans can be delivered, but when a teachable moment may present itself, instructors will have available for them, to deliver to their target audience.

The lesson plans include topics such as teen crimes, gambling, prescription drug abuse, gang awareness, drug awareness, dating violence, distracted driving etc. These lesson plans, some can be taught in a forty to fifty minute class period and others can be taught over several class periods. They are each designed with discussion and interaction between the instructors and offer a realistic approach to teen drug, gang and violence prevention.

Conclusion

The G.A.T.E. program has grown from being delivered in one school system in suburban Chicago to expanding to seventeen states in the United States and Canada in just seven years. The program has replaced many well known programs and had some great successes. As the G.A.T.E. curriculum continues to evolve, as it was designed to do, the positives of this program will only increase, making it a much needed resource in the fight against gangs, drugs and violence that threatens America's teens today.