

# DRUG PREVENTION

## Interactive Approaches Work Best

By Harvey Lee

In a small island school, a classroom of 30 students quietly listens to the teacher's lecture on the dangers of tobacco as part of a drug prevention unit. In another classroom, the students work in small groups facilitated by peers, discussing the content of InfoFacts (information sheets listing the effects of different substances on the body, available at [www.drugabuse.gov/Infobox/Infoboxindex.html](http://www.drugabuse.gov/Infobox/Infoboxindex.html)). The students are noisy, but focused on the task of creating a cross-peer presentation for the elementary school.

Did you ever wonder what makes a universal school-based drug prevention program work? In the article "School-Based Adolescent Drug Prevention Programs: 1998 Meta-analysis" (*Journal of Primary Prevention*, 2000), researcher Nancy Tobler and her associates reported that interactive programs were found to be an effective method of delivery. Programs using the lecture format to teach the drug facts or using programs that are not interactive to enhance self-esteem were found to have little or no effect.

Tobler also found that mental health clinicians and peer educators were effective in leading interactive programs. The Republic of Palau, with a population of 20,000, is home to two programs that have adopted the successful strategies of using interactive prevention programs and peers to deliver the message to other students. The Ministry of Education supports the use of peer educators through the Pride Club at Palau High School, and the Ministry of Health organizes youth leaders known as the VIP, sponsored by the Tobacco Coalition. The role of the student educators is to deliver drug prevention information at the classroom and community level using multiple methods of instruction.

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