

1.11 Interactive teaching methods key to effective substance use prevention in schools

Findings A meta-analysis (► [Glossary](#)) has aggregated data from 120 US and Canadian drug prevention programmes aimed at what in the UK would be secondary school pupils. The clearest finding was that 'interactive' programmes were significantly more effective than non-interactive programmes. A later paper drawing on the same data (► [Secondary sources](#)) elaborated this finding.

The meta-analysis categorised programmes according to content (knowledge, refusal skills, feelings, etc) and group process. *Non-interactive* programmes were defined as being based on teacher-to-pupil communication focusing on individual learning, values and self-esteem. In contrast, *interactive* programmes foster pupil-to-pupil communication and focus on interpersonal skills and activities. The latter were clearly superior whether the measures involved later use of tobacco, alcohol, cannabis or other illicit drugs. As a whole, non-interactive programmes were *ineffective*. A more detailed comparison confirmed that interactive teaching confers benefits even when the content is similar to that in non-interactive programmes. **LINKS** [Nuggets 1.12, 1.13](#); [Teaching in the tender years](#), p. 4

The overall impact even of interactive programmes was modest, but smaller studies suggested that impacts could be substantial in more controlled situations with well trained group leaders. Outside these conditions, interactive programmes may register poor outcomes due to incomplete implementation. Teachers often feel uncomfortable about and lack training in facilitating group interaction and the self-disclosure integral to open and effective communication may be constrained in front of teachers with a disciplinary role.

In context Nancy Tobler's meta-analyses (from which the current studies are the latest offshoots) provide the most reliable indications to date of the impact of drug education. The superiority of interactive programmes was a robust finding consistent across several analyses, including a subset of higher quality studies. Her explanation is that peer-to-peer programmes are more in tune with the salience of peer relations in adolescence. They also deal with preventing drug use in the same social context within which drug use itself occurs. How far this finding transfers to European cultures is relatively untested. Official guidance in the UK mentions active learning, group work and social skills but without highlighting these to the degree suggested by Tobler's findings, while with respect to drugs the emphasis in the National Curriculum is on knowledge acquisition rather than interpersonal skills.

Practice implications Teachers need training and support in implementing interactive programmes. There is an urgent need to identify or develop, test and, if successful, promote teaching packages in which peer-to-peer interaction is the central delivery vehicle. Even if valuable for other reasons, programmes which concentrate on values and self esteem with individual learning as the major teaching strategy are likely to be ineffective drug prevention.

Main sources ① Tobler N.S., Stratton H. "Effectiveness of school-based drug prevention programmes: a meta-analysis of the research." *Journal of Primary Prevention*: 1997, 18(1), p. 71–128. Copies: apply ISDD ② Tobler N.S. "Meta-analysis of adolescent drug prevention programs: results of the 1993 meta-analysis." In: Bukoski W.J., ed. *Meta-analysis of drug abuse prevention programs*. NIDA, 1997. Copies from NCADI, P.O. Box 2345, Rockville MD 20847-2345, USA. E-mail info@health.org.

Secondary sources Black D.R., Tobler, N.S., Sciacca J.P. "Peer helping/involvement: an efficacious way to meet the challenge of reducing alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use among youth?" *Journal of School Health*: 1998, 68(3), p. 87–93. Copies: apply ISDD.

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We are grateful to **David Foxcroft** of the National Coordinating Centre for Health Technology Assessment, University of Southampton for his contribution to this entry.