

Title:

The Case for Peers

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Bernard, Bonnie. The Case for Peers. Western Center for Drug Free Schools and Communities. 1990: 1-12

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Conclusion:

This article reviewed a great deal of research on child development and peer resource programs to demonstrate the need to incorporate peer resource models into current educational systems. By synthesizing previous research the author concludes that peer resource programming has an impact on the cognitive, social, and emotional development of young people. In addition, relationships to positive behavioral outcomes in academic achievement and drug-using behavior were also noted.

By reviewing previous data and research analysis the author was able to determine key components of prevention programming that were common themes in effective prevention programs. The author points out that these essential components may seem similar but peer resource programming is still only incorporated into the classrooms about 7-20% of the time. In addition, the author points out there is no comprehensive peer resource model that is being used by educational systems.

The author concludes the article by highlighting a paradigm shift that needs to take place for a peer resource models to become common throughout the educational world. Work of previous researchers points out that in order for peer resource programs to be globally implemented schools must move from the attitude of seeing youth as problems to be dealt with to seeing youth as resources, or part of the solution. This change may require a change in the way teachers are trained as well as a change in the governing philosophy of some school districts.

Purpose:

In this article the author reviews, analyzes, and compiles previous research done on "peer resource" programs and strategies. Peer resources, as defined in this article, refer to children and youth working with and/or helping other children and youth. The programs include "youth service, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, cross-age tutoring, peer helping, peer mediation, peer leadership, and youth involvement." Throughout the article the author uses the data obtained from the previous studies to advocate for peer resource programs to be implemented throughout curriculum in school districts everywhere.

The author highlights research that shows the impact peer resource programs have been shown to have on the social and academic development of young people. The data from prior studies is also used to highlight the effective components of peer resource programming as well as review

current practices that the author views as inhibiting the implementation of effective peer resource programming.

Findings:

According to the research compiled to complete this article, peer resource programming is shown to enhance the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children. Nine rationales are given for peer resource programming for youth. They include:

1. **Importance of peer relationships in social development**
 - Peer relationships provide an arena where attitudes, values and skills can be learned directly
 - Interactions tend to be more frequent, intense and diverse which allows for experimentation
 - For youth to internalize moral standards, peers are especially critical
 - Opportunities are provided for youth to learn to share, help, comfort and empathize with others
 - Critical social skills are learned
 - Influences school/academic achievement
 - Influences a child's development of identity and autonomy
2. **Importance of social support to positive outcomes**—Protective friendships and peer social networks play an important role in the positive development of youth
3. **The failure of adult society to provide social capital for youth**—Since WWII, changes in family life have increased the number of children at all economic levels who experience disconnectedness [increased natural broken/frayed family relationships]
4. **Gives every youth the opportunity to help**—Peer resource programs most effective when each person experiences both helping and being helped.
5. **Satisfies basic human psychological needs**—needs to belong and love, gain power, be free, and have fun
6. **Opportunity to develop collaboration/conflict resolution skills**—Cooperative/collaborative learning in childhood may lead to adults in the future NOT being turf-protective
7. **Promotes acceptance and respect for diversity**—mainstream and develop multicultural sensitive classrooms
8. **Promotes academic achievement**—hundreds of evaluations support this rationale
9. **Reduces youth alcohol and drug use**—more effective than all the other programs

Although it is not the focus of the article, the author summarizes the important components of effective peer resource prevention programming including; " positive interdependence, face to face interaction, individual accountability, social skills training, group processing, heterogeneous composition, each child must be given a helping role, adequate duration, and youth involvement in program implementation."

Implications for Prevention:

Peer resource programming as discussed by the author is a very comprehensive concept. The studies related to the impact of peer programming on alcohol, tobacco, and drug use were mainly focused on peer program prevention.

These ingredients appear essential when creating effective peer programs:

- Positive interdependence—Students must perceive that it is to their advantage if they and other students learn well.
- Face-to-face interaction
- Individual accountability—Each youth must be held accountable for learning the material and providing help/support to another
- Training in social skills for building and maintaining collaborative relationships
- Allow time for reflection and processing on how well groups are functioning
- Groups are diverse
- Each child is a helper
- Groups function for an adequate time to develop relationships
- Youth are involved in program implementation

Prevention practitioners utilizing the peer program strategy may want to review the finding of this article to enhance and possibly improve peer program prevention.

Summary Provided By:

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