

Annotated Bibliography:

Peer Helping and Youth Service-Learning

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The peer helping approach grew out of a desire to teach youth the skills of reaching out to their peers, especially those who lack social skills in making friends, are ignored, isolated, forgotten or not known. During adolescence youth turn first to their peers for help with all kinds of problems, and young people want to learn how to help when someone turns to them. As the program developed, many trained students have become very effective peer helpers.

Peer helping programs (sometimes called peer counseling), which began in the late 1960s, involve equipping nonprofessionals to serve in helping roles, such as peer tutoring, cross-age education, mentoring, welcoming new students, parent education, and conflict mediation. Young people who act as peer helpers serve as extensions of teachers and guidance counselors, and, in cases of cross-age peer helping, they become role models for younger children.

Peer helping readily aligns with service-learning. Both fields emphasize empowerment models with strong preparation and reflection components. Both seek to help young people contribute to others and society while also developing as resources and leaders. And both seek to involve young people as human resources globally.

Preparation and service go hand in hand. Service-learning leaders many not be aware of the wealth of training wisdom available through peer helping. Intensive peer helper training goes beyond basic communication skills to include ways of dealing with authority figures, decision-making, and how and when to refer or to turn to professionals for help. Without preparation, a person cannot be an effective peer helper—or a service-learning participant. But without service,

the peer helping training does not have as much impact on youth or their school or community, and the helpers are not as effective.

Once students are trained, they are ready for service related to their training. Peer mentoring, peer tutoring, peer mediation, and peer ministry are all “application” service assignments. After students take an assignment, supervision and reflection are necessary, frequently in groups so that all can learn from the experience of others.

By providing opportunities for meaningful service combined with robust training and reflection components, peer helping service-learning programs can play a major role in reducing young people’s sense of disconnection from their schools and communities that manifests in health-compromising or antisocial behaviors. In its place, peer helping linked to service-learning nurtures young people’s social competence, positive values, growing sense of self, and sense of belonging to their schools and communities.

Overall summary of the peer helping field

National Association of Peer Programs. **Programmatic Standards and Ethics**, rev. ed., 2010.
<http://www.peerprogramprofessionals.org/publications/standards/2010.doc>

These standards of practice outline the best practices and processes for designing and implementing peer helping programs. First published in 1990, they provide research-based guidelines for all aspects of designing, monitoring, evaluating and improving peer helping programs. The ethical guidelines provide safeguards for the peer helpers and the students with whom they work as well as for the programs as a whole.

Varenhorst, Barbara B. “**Tapping the Power of Peer Helping.**” *Reclaiming Children and Youth: The Journal of Strength-based Interventions*, vol. 13 (3) 2004, 130.

The author offers a clear definition of peer helping, the core of which is that help is provided formally and informally by non-professional individuals, primarily young people. Young people are recruited, trained, and supervised to systematically reach out to peers who are ignored, lack the social skills to make friends, and are slipping through the cracks because they are isolated and forgotten or not known. The training teaches youth listening, relationship, and Peer Mediation skills, as well as how to seek professional help when a life may be in danger.

Varenhorst, Barbara B. “**Why Peer Helping?**” *The Peer Facilitator Quarterly*, 10 (2), 1992, 13-17.

http://www.peerprogramprofessionals.org/publications/Why_Peer_Helping.pdf

Participating in peer helping programs offers many benefits for youth. They develop a sense of their own unique qualities, skills, talents and experiences that can be used to help others; they experience membership in a valued group; and they have the opportunity to participate in meaningful roles. Peer programs, further, provide essential social supports that benefit both the helpers and the young people who are helped. Many of the same values and experiences are core to the philosophy of service-learning.

Resources and effective practices: Peer Helping

Baggerly, Jennifer and Gary Landreth. (2001). “**Training children to help children: A new dimension in play therapy.**” *The Peer Facilitator Quarterly*, 18(1), 2001, 6-14.

This article reports on a ten week program to train fifth grade students to use child-centered play therapy skills in weekly special play sessions with kindergartners who were experiencing adjustment difficulties. Although researchers did not find statistically relevant differences between the intervention group and the control group of young children, the researchers' observations and teachers' comments indicated positive effects including increased self-esteem and self-confidence.

Beale, Andrew V., and Kimberly R. Hall. "**Solutions-Focused Role Play: Its Use in Training Peer Helpers.**" *Perspectives in Peer Programs*, vol. 19 (4), 2005, 143-147.

Role play has long been an effective component in peer helper training and supervision. Solutions-focused role play differs from traditional role play in its focus on multiple ways to solve a problem. The authors describe a six step process to guide peer helpers through a role play experience that helps them understand that there are multiple solutions to common problems students face. This process would be equally beneficial for the training and reflection components of service-learning programs.

Holcomb-McCoy, Cheryl. "**Using Multicultural Literature To Enhance Elementary Peer Helper Training.**" *Peer Facilitator Quarterly*, vol. 18 (4), 2003, 45-48.

This article describes how to integrate multicultural literature into the training of elementary peer helpers, thus enhancing peer helpers' cultural sensitivity. The author includes book selection guidelines and lists of recommended books relevant to African Americans, Asian Americans, Latina/Latino Americans, and Native Americans.

Larrier, Yvonne I.; Sandra M. Harris, and Jeremy M. Linton. “**Promoting Student Strengths in a Strengths-Enhancing Environment through an Elementary Peer Helping Program: A One-Year Effectiveness Study.**” *Perspectives in Peer Programs*, vol. 22 (1), 2009, 30-51.

This study explored the effectiveness of an elementary school (fifth grade) peer helping program with a service-learning component in which students were involved in off-campus service projects designed to provide learning opportunities for social and emotional growth. Results showed gains in participants’ interpersonal relationships, academic performance and personal characteristics, including increases in students’ desire to help others, self-confidence, and persistence.

Myrick, Robert D., and Tom Erney. **Caring and Sharing: Becoming a Peer Facilitator**, 2nd ed. Minneapolis, MN: Educational Media Corporation, 2000.

This is a student handbook presenting a structured training program that includes chapters on attentive listening, facilitative responses and feedback, assessing oneself and others, responsible decision-making, Peer Mediation in the school, and handling problem moments. All of these topics can enrich service-learning training programs.

Painter, Carol. **Friends Helping Friends: A Manual for Peer Counselors, and Friends Helping Friends: A Leaders Guide.** Minneapolis, MN: Educational Media Corp, 1989.

Painter, Carol. **Friends Helping Friends: A Handbook for Helpers**, 2nd ed. Minneapolis, MN: Educational Media Corporation, 2003.

[http://www.educationalmedia.com/Merchant2/merchant.mv?Screen=PROD&Store_Code=EMO
C&Product_Code=FH2&Category_Code=](http://www.educationalmedia.com/Merchant2/merchant.mv?Screen=PROD&Store_Code=EMO&Product_Code=FH2&Category_Code=)

In these two resources the author describes the philosophy of helping, and the skills of attending, empathy, clarifying/questioning, assertiveness, confrontation, and problem solving that are core elements in these middle and high school peer helping training curricula.

Quigley, Richard. **“Positive Peer Groups: “Helping Others” Meets Primary Developmental Needs.”** *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, vol. 13 (3), 2004, 134-137.

This article focuses on the many benefits to high-risk youth of learning to become peer helpers and using these skills to help others. Helping others teaches youth a sense of connection and interdependence with other people, and this helps form a sense of responsibility to the community. Both these elements are often missing from the lives of at risk youth. There are clear connections with the philosophy and practice of service-learning.

Stuart, C., J. K. Waalen, and E. Haelstromm. **“Many helping hearts: an evaluation of peer gatekeeper training in suicide risk assessment.”** *Death Studies*, vol. 27 (4), 321-333.

Peer helping programs for adolescents are highly successful in training them in helping skills. The authors state that these programs often do not have a training component that teaches students suicide risk assessment. The authors describe several evaluations of peer helping programs that have found that suicide assessment training is a natural and effective component of peer helping programs, and they outline the Peer Gatekeeper Training program, a suicide prevention program in British Columbia, that has found success training students in suicide assessment.

Varenhorst, Barbara B. **An Asset Builder's Guide to Training Peer Helpers: Fifteen Sessions On Communication, Assertiveness, and Decision-Making Skills.** Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute, 2003.

This resource prepares teachers, youth workers, and other adults to train young people to make the positive interactions needed in peer helping. Through a comprehensive, fifteen-session curriculum, this guide enables adult leaders to lead a Peer-Helping program full of activities that teach youth powerful relationship skills that help build assets.

Resources and effective practices: Peer Ministry

Varenhorst, Barbara B., and Lyle Griner. **Peer Ministry Training Manual.** Minneapolis, MN: Vibrant Faith Ministries, 2005.

This curriculum is designed to train adults in congregations to train young people to help youth build the skills and relationships they need to care for others as peer ministers. The new edition includes the Developmental Asset framework. Topics include listening to understand, nonverbal listening, decisions and values, sensitive issues, and sharing faith.

A related resource is: Griner, Lyle. **Peer Ministry Day-by-Day Journal.** Minneapolis, MN: Vibrant Faith Ministries. <http://www.youthandfamilyinstitute.org/>

Resources and effective practices: Peer Mediation

Bogner, Roselind Gullo, Francis Salvatore, and Elizabeth Manley. **“The Effects of Peer Mediation Programs on Middle School Academic Performance.”** *Perspectives in Peer Programs*, vol. 21 (2), 2008, 59-68.

Researchers studied whether students attending middle schools that had peer helping or peer empowerment programs scored higher on New York state standardized achievement tests than students at schools without these programs. While researchers did not find evidence that the presence of a number of types of peer programs affected academic outcomes, a positive correlation was found for peer mediation programs.

Cohen, Richard. **Students Resolving Conflict: Peer Mediation in Schools**, 2nd ed. Tucson, AZ: Good Year Books, 2005.

<http://www.schoolmediation.com/books/index.html>

The goal of peer mediation is to teach students to resolve conflicts peacefully and to appreciate differences. This resource is a complete guide to creating, implementing and sustaining Peer Mediation programs in schools. There is a related DVD, **Mediation: An Alternative That Works**.

Safe and Responsive Schools. **Creating a Positive Climate: Peer Mediation**. (What Works in Preventing School Violence).

<http://www.indiana.edu/~safeschl/PeerMediation.pdf>

In peer mediation student mediators learn a process of communication and problem solving that they apply to help their peers settle their disputes and disagreements in a way that is peaceful and respectful to both parties. Key elements to making mediation work include careful program planning, an in-depth, 12-15 hour initial training program in which students are taught a peaceful approach to conflict resolution, and ongoing implementation including careful monitoring of the program by facilitators and ongoing meetings of the mediators in which they reflect on issues,

successes, and problems. There are many parallels with the design of quality service-learning programs, and peer mediation offers an important service within the school community.

Resources and effective practices: Peer Mentoring

Bell, M. L., T. Kelly-Baker, T. Falb, and C. Roberts-Gray. “**Protecting You/Protecting Me: Evaluation of a Student-Led Alcohol Prevention and Traffic Safety Program for Elementary Students.**” *Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education*, vol. 49 (1), 2005, 33-53.

Padget, A., M. L. Bell, S. R. Shamblen, and C. Ringwalt. “**Effects on High School Students of Teaching a Cross-Age Alcohol Prevention Program.**” *Journal of Drug Education*, vol. 35 (3), 2005, 201-216.

http://www.pypm.org/pubdocs/JDE_Effects_on_HS_students.pdf

These are two of a number of reports and journal articles reporting on a five-year evaluation of the Protecting You/Protecting Me (PY/PM) program in four schools. The 2003 evaluation report can be found on this website: http://www.madd.org/docs/PYPM_Results_2003.pdf

This program had both adult-led and youth-led components. Youth-led PY/PM was a cross-age prevention program in which high school age peer helpers taught an alcohol use prevention and vehicle safety program to elementary students. Evaluation results found positive effects for both elementary and high school participants. Elementary students improved vehicle safety skills, became more media-wise, and increased their knowledge about the brain. The high school students increased their knowledge of alcohol risks, reported less binge drinking, and increased teaching skills. Examining how this successful program was designed and delivered can offer service-learning leaders insights into creating successful cross-age programs.

Corporation for National and Community Service. **Establishing a Cross-Age Peer Mentoring program.**

<http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/node/17891>

This Effective Practices report describes the YouthZone Teen Pal Mentoring program in Glenwood Springs, Colorado that has been operating since 1990. This is a rural program that matches high school mentors with elementary or middle school students. In designing this program the leaders modified the traditional adult to youth mentoring model in several areas-- recruitment, screening, training, supervision, and evaluation.

Dennison, Susan. “**A Win-Win Peer Mentoring and Tutoring Program: A Collaborative Model.**” *Journal of Primary Prevention*, vol. 20 (3), 2000, 161-174.

This article describes the Big Buddies’ Program, a Peer Mentoring and tutoring project for undergraduate social work students. The goals of the project were to motivate the younger students to remain in school and to increase their interest in volunteerism as well as to expand real-world experience for the university students. The program is outlined in detail along with replication guidelines.

EMT Associates. **Peer Mentoring and Academic Success.** Mentoring Fact Sheet, no. 7, 2005.

<http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/factsheet7.pdf>

EMT Associates. **Overcoming Relationship Pitfalls.** Mentoring Fact Sheet, no. 10, 2006.

<http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/factsheet10.pdf>

These two fact sheets offer practical tips for peer mentors. Their suggestions will also be useful to service-learning participants.

Herrera, Carla, Tina J. Kauh, Siobhan M. Cooney, Jean Grossman Baldwin, and Jennifer McMaken. **High School Students as Mentors: Findings from the Big Brothers Big Sisters School-Based Mentoring Impact Study**. NY: Public/Private Ventures, 2008.

http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/252_publication.pdf

Although researchers found that, in general, high school students were less effective than adults in yielding impacts for the youth they mentor, this study identified several program practices that were linked with longer, stronger and more effective high school mentor relationships.

Karcher, Michael. “**Increases in Academic Connectedness and Self-Esteem Among High School Students Who Serve as Cross-Age Peer Mentors.**” *Professional School Counseling*, vol. 12 (4), 2009, 292-299.

Cross-age mentoring programs are peer helping programs in which high school students serve as mentors to younger students. This article reports on a study of connectedness, attachment, and self-esteem between 46 teen mentors and 45 comparison classmates. Results showed an association between serving as a peer mentor and increases in academic self-esteem and connectedness.

U.S. Department of Justice. “**Make a Friend: Be a Peer Mentor.**” *Youth in Action*, 8, 1999.

<http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/171691.pdf>

A practical guide to planning and implementing a school-based Peer Mentoring program from the initial proposal through program evaluation.