



The Scalability of Mentoring

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Young people who have positive relationships with adults at school are more likely to succeed academically. However, many students of color and students from low-income backgrounds do

not always have the opportunity to develop meaningful and sustainable relationships with adults at or outside of school.



Figure 1 Photograph by Andrea Piacquadio. Pexels. CCO

Mentoring has been filling this gap, but the one-to-one mentoring model simply cannot serve all students in need. Whereas the best-known approach involves matching a young person with a caring

"Results point to the promise of group mentoring as an approach for increasing resilience among academically vulnerable adolescents."

adult, innovative approaches such as group mentoring, in which one or more mentors meet regularly over time with a group of youth, have become increasingly common.

Group mentoring is an innovative and efficient way to connect young people to caring adults and develop relationships with prosocial peers. One such program, Project Arrive (PA), was developed by a large urban school district as a strategy for helping 9th graders whose school records demonstrate a high risk for continued academic difficulties and school dropout.

Highlights

Group mentoring is a promising strategy for building resilience among young people vulnerable to school dropout.

Prioritizing relationships building between peers, mentors, and adults is important to youths' success

Mentoring in small groups is more scalable than traditional one-on-one mentoring.

PA groups typically include 2 adults, usually counselors, wellness professionals, or other school employees, matched with groups of about 8 students. Groups meet weekly during school hours throughout the academic year to encourage academic effort. The program emphasizes a resilience perspective, which shifts attention away from risks and deficits towards strengths and resources of students.

PA also seeks to help young people succeed in school through group discussions and activities that reinforce and help them to develop resources, such as social supports and feelings of connectedness. Discussions and activities also build personal assets and skills, such as self-confidence and problem-solving.

The current work examined the effectiveness of a school-based group mentoring program. We set out to test whether participating in PA contributes to increases in resilience assets and resources and academic outcomes. We found that group mentoring is effective in promoting immediate and intermediate academic achievement in students who are vulnerable to high school dropout.

Methods

Data were collected from 9th grade students who participated in PA and 9th grade students who had similar characteristics, but attended schools that did not offer PA. The study included surveys administered to 116 PA and 71 comparison students early in the fall and at the end of the spring of the 9th grade year. These surveys assessed students' perceptions of resilience factors, including self-confidence, problem-solving and perspective-taking skills. The survey also assessed students' sense of belonging at school and support from parents, teachers, and peers that could help them overcome challenges. We also tracked changes in academic progress, including attendance, grades, and course completion from 8th grade through 10th grade for 239 PA participants and 980 comparison students.

Results

- PA participants showed improvements in several “resilience resources” when compared to youth with similar risk profiles, including a sense of belonging in school, teacher and peer support, a sense of meaningful involvement at school and at home, and connectedness to prosocial peers.

HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR WORK?

Community Psychology emphasizes a strengths-based perspective. It is important to consider individuals' personal skills and attitudes and the resources in their social environments that can help them to achieve well-being. The resilience framework used here shifts the focus away from a typical view of adolescence as a period of risk. We looked beyond youths' shortcomings to examine the positive potential of youth working in small groups with supportive adults to achieve personal and collective goals.

- PA participants showed improvements in one “resilience asset” – problem solving skills - compared to youth with similar risk profiles.
- PA participants had better attendance than non-PA Participants through 9th grade and earned significantly more credits toward graduation through 10th grade.
- Although grade point averages remained relatively low both for participants and comparisons, the average participant was on track to graduate by the end of 10th grade, while the average comparison student had fallen nearly half a semester behind.

What Does This Mean For?

Research and Evaluation: This work supports a growing body of research showing that innovative approaches to mentoring are effective in promoting a range of positive developmental outcomes for youth. Group mentoring has the potential to build on the central working ingredient of mentoring – the power of positive relationships – to address some limitations of 1:1 mentoring by increasing a program’s ability to reach larger numbers and introducing new ways of engaging young people.

Practice: While mentoring is a popular and proven approach for promoting youth development, the traditional 1:1 mentoring model may not always be feasible. An innovative approach is needed when youth needing a mentor outnumber the pool of available mentors, resources for program monitoring and supervision are limited, or the setting is not conducive to a 1:1 mentoring. This work provides evidence of the value of an approach that can extend the reach of mentoring to larger numbers of youth.

Social Action: The results serve as a reminder that labeling people as being “at risk” tells us very little about what they are capable of accomplishing. It is critical to recognize the power of interventions that engage young people in the process of building their own skills and support systems, rather than cast them as passive recipients of interventions to pull them out of risk.

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