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Enlisting Peers in Developmental Interventions

Principles and Practices

Michael J. Karcher, B. Bradford Brown, and Douglas W. Elliott

One of the hallmarks of the adolescent stage of life in the United States is a sharp increase in the amount of time that young people spend with peers (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984). Much of this time is spent in settings unsupervised by adults, and it can involve unhealthy or risky behavior. However, there is considerable evidence of the positive, growth-promoting qualities of peer interaction on adolescent development (Berndt, 1998; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). This has prompted many practitioners to design interventions that enlist adolescents in the reciprocal process of facilitating each other's development. A growing literature on this topic suggests that adults who organize peer interventions can harness young people's potential to help one another by structuring interactions through formal programs, but to be effective, they must also prevent peer interactions from causing harm.

This chapter focuses on two questions: First, how can peers enhance one another's healthy development during adolescence? Second, how can community agency staff, school counselors, and other adults enlist the positive,

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growth-enhancing qualities of youth's peer interactions to create positive, peer-based interventions? We begin by reframing the traditional view of peer influences on development and then articulate principles for the design of effective, peer-based interventions. Next, we offer illustrations of several types of programs, highlighting exemplary ones.

Peer Influences on Adolescent Development

Typically, peer influence during adolescence is understood in terms of peer pressure and as a negative force to be strenuously avoided. In fact, the central objective of many intervention programs is to provide young people with "peer pressure resistance" skills, such as in Botvin's (1989) Life Skills Training; the Project Northland curricula (Williams, Perry, Farbakhsh, & Veblen-Mortenson, 1999); and Spivak and Shure's (1974) Interpersonal Problem-Solving Program. Yet this approach provides a one-sided view of peer pressure that leads to an underconceptualized understanding of the complex ways in which peers influence each other's development during adolescence.

Four Modes of Peer Influence

There are four major modes of peer influence (Brown & Theobald, 1998). The power of tacit *group norms* is one form of peer pressure. Adolescents are influenced not only by peers with whom they have formal (e.g., classmate, teammate) and informal relationships (e.g., friend, romantic partner) but also by peers and peer groups with whom they would like to have relationships. Adolescents unintentionally influence one another via efforts to emulate their peers' behaviors in order to achieve desired relationships and to fit in with general social norms (e.g., "But, Mom, *nobody* wears those kind of shoes anymore"). A second mode of influence, which happens more often within the context of ongoing relationships with friends and acquaintances, is *peer pressure*—a direct, intentional effort to shape an adolescent's attitudes or behavior. The two other modes can occur within the context of actual or desired relationships. Peers influence one another by *modeling* or displaying a behavior that either is to be copied or scrupulously avoided. Finally, peers influence one another by *structuring opportunities* or creating situations in which certain behaviors can occur.

For most adolescents, several of these modes may operate simultaneously, and these modes of influence can contradict each other (Brown, 1999). For

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example, an adolescent may find herself at a party at which close friends encourage her not to drink at the same time that peers she desires to befriend are bonding through the experience of drinking alcohol together. Prosocial and antisocial influences also may emerge within a single peer relationship, as when a close friend encourages trust and empathy within the relationship but at the same time goads the young person to participate in health-compromising, deviant, or unconventional activities.

This same complex set of dynamic influences is apparent in formal groups and structured activities. For example, general group norms will be established among a group of peers in a team, club, or activity, but these norms may either be incompatible or compete with behaviors modeled by group leaders. In adult-structured interventions that involve groups of peers, such as group counseling or in-class guidance curricula, the expectations of adults may conflict with pressures that participants sense from close associates within the group. Dishion, McCord, and Poulin (1999) cautioned that group interventions with teenagers can fail when they bring together a set of deviant peers who succeed in reinforcing each other's inclinations toward deviant activity. Effective interventions must be designed in a way that is mindful of all four modes of influence and with an awareness of direct as well as indirect peer influences.

Reciprocal Influences of Social Support and Interpersonal Skills

Two important ways in which peers foster healthy development are by providing social support to each other and by enhancing one another's interpersonal skills. Teenagers routinely turn to each other for advice, emotional support, and material assistance. An important aspect of autonomy during adolescence is learning to rely on peers as well as parents and other adults for these resources (Cooper, Grotevant, & Condon, 1983; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Of course, to take advantage of these resources, adolescents must possess effective interpersonal skills. Otherwise, their relationships may be too short-lived, too ridden with conflict and mistrust, or too superficial to provide meaningful support and assistance.

Many adolescents need some help in mastering the interpersonal skills necessary to sustain meaningful peer relationships (Parker & Asher, 1987; Selman, Watts, & Schultz, 1997). These skills can be inculcated or encouraged by adults but also may be fostered by peers. Lerner (1982) suggests that one way in which youth become producers of their own development is by helping each other learn how to take feedback from others and react

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to conflict in positive ways. One primary developmental task for adolescents is a shift from a childhood self-centeredness toward an understanding of their embeddedness within larger communities (Yates & Youniss, 1996). This social embeddedness facilitates the development of social connectedness and caring, self-confidence, and character, as well as a number of social competencies (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2002; Karcher & Lindwall, in press). The shift from self-centeredness to social embeddedness is facilitated by peer involvement in the middle and high school years.

Constructive peer influence is contingent on the establishment and maintenance of relationships with prosocial peers as well as mastery of effective interpersonal skills, a reciprocal process. To build positive relationships, adolescents need to use appropriate interpersonal skills. Then, they can draw on the resources within these relationships to master additional prosocial behaviors and achieve important developmental milestones. Peer-based interventions can be aimed at either building social relationships or enhancing interpersonal sills, or both; social support and interpersonal skills are reciprocal.

One of the most important roles that adults can play is helping to structure opportunities and contexts so that the peer interactions are developmental and constructive (Larson, Wilson, Brown, Furstenberg, & Verma, 2002). Yet many youth development programs do not explicitly highlight the possibilities for youth, both youth at promise and those at risk, to creatively work as active agents in fostering the development of their peers and other youths. Evolving definitions of positive youth development programs should be expanded to fully encompass the use of peers in interventions. The definition must move away from the position that programs, information, and skills are to be provided by adults to youth and toward the idea that interventions also can be provided by youth to youth (Camino, 2000). Rather than unilaterally imparting program content or activities to youth, effective youth development programs need to be structured to provide opportunities for youth to participate in reciprocal, cooperative, developmental peer interactions. This may require principles and goals that differ from the traditional approach taken in primary and secondary preventive interventions.

Principles for Developing Peer Interventions

Principles for developing effective peer interventions should reflect both the social changes and expanded environments in which adolescents operate, as

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well as their unique developmental changes. Youth interventions should be voluntary and structured in ways that promote prosocial engagement with peers. Intervention activities and goals should include perspective taking and identity development. Finally, peer interventions should promote effective interactions among youth from diverse cultural/racial backgrounds and both genders. Each of these principles is elaborated below.

Offer Structured Voluntary Activities

Peer interventions should be structured and voluntary. Larson (2000) suggests that "boredom, alienation, and disconnection" are signs of deficiencies in positive development (p. 170), and he makes this point to reveal the conditions under which positive development occurs. Larson suggests that youth development occurs through activities in which youth are intrinsically motivated, given structure and guidelines by which to engage their environment, and presented with challenges and opportunities for sustained concentration and commitment within a widened peer group. Unless activities are both voluntary and structured (with constraints, rules, and goals), youth tend not to remain attentive, motivated, and persistent (Fantuzzo, Riggio, Connelly, & Dimeff, 1989; Larson, 2000).

The challenge of using voluntary activities with youth who may not initially want to participate is readily apparent; however, it may be just as challenging to effectively implement mandatory youth development activities with intervention-resistant youth (Gibbs, Potter, Barriga, & Liau, 1996). Forcing such youth into involuntary interventions can have deleterious effects (Catterall, 1987; Dishion et al., 1999); involuntary service activities often do not result in the same benefits for youth as do voluntary service activities (Stukas, Clary, & Snyder, 1999). Yet often youth can be motivated either by providing some nominal incentive or giving them the opportunity to choose among a variety of activities. When youth are provided opportunities to exercise their volition, this alone can be motivating, regardless of the options that are available. Simply asking a youth to help often can be sufficient motivation.

Two cross-age peer-tutoring programs, the Time Dollar Cross-Age Peer Tutoring program and the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, offer unique solutions to the challenge of encouraging participation among a broad range of students through the use of extrinsic benefits as incentives for participating in the programs.

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Incentives in Peer-Tutoring Programs

Time Dollar Cross-Age Peer Tutoring program. Tutors participating in this program receive one Time Dollar for every hour of tutoring. Peer tutoring in reading and math is available to students for 1 hour after school, 5 days a week, for 28 weeks. After earning 100 Time Dollars and getting their parents to earn 8 Time Dollars by volunteering after school and attending local school council meetings and community-policing meetings, students earn a refurbished computer preloaded with productivity software, a mouse, mouse pad, software manual, and T-shirt. More than 200 students attended the after-school tutoring sessions in one program's first year.

Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. Older at-risk students are paid minimum wage to tutor younger students at least 4 hours per week in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth program, in which typically four grades separate them. Tutors also attend weekly meetings with their teacher coordinators to develop their own literacy and tutoring skills.

Although material incentives such as computers and money can be useful tools to encourage youth to join programs, care needs to be exercised in how incentives are employed. Such incentives may be useful in overcoming initial resistance to program participation, but they should not overshadow the main goals of the program. Through its basic structure, the program should offer some intrinsic benefits to youth. In the Time Dollar program, the experience of academic success and esteem of their younger tutees likely increases the tutors' motivation, allowing the goal of earning the computer to recede into the background.

Promote Perspective Taking and Identity Development

Successful social skills require growth in perspective taking and identity (Cooper et al., 1983; Selman, 1980), and for this reason, both have been the focus of many youth interventions (Enright, Colby, & McMullin, 1977; Selman et al., 1997). Miscommunication and misunderstanding among peers may result in adverse consequences such as violence and social isolation. To prevent such consequences, peer mediation activities can teach youth to be empathic, to restate one another's needs or beliefs, and to learn to coordinate perspectives when resolving conflict (Lane-Garon, 1998).

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Promoting perspective taking in peer interventions also provides opportunities to directly address and sometimes prevent cross-cultural and cross-gender misunderstanding. For example, when youth begin to base part of their developing identities on their ethnic group memberships, they may initially base these identities on group stereotypes (Erikson, 1968; Matute-Bianchi, 1986). Peer interventions provide unique opportunities to help youth understand between-group and within-group differences and avoid foreclosing on a negative or stereotypical ethnic identity.

The Time Dollar and Coca-Cola Valued Youth programs illustrate the importance of structuring activities that promote perspective taking and identity development. Both programs are designed to involve as tutors those students who might not ordinarily volunteer for such a role (Cardenas, Montecel, Supik, & Harris, 1992). It appears that many of these tutors are attracted to the program by the initial incentive but then become "hooked" by viewing themselves as competent at facilitating their tutees' learning. Within the Time Dollar program, several tutors suggested that seeing other students struggle to learn the material and being able to see themselves as competent in reading and math (sometimes for the first time) helped them take new perspectives on themselves and to feel better about themselves as students (Washington-Steward, 2000).

Promote Intergroup Relations

One of the biggest challenges youth will face in the future is living in communities in which multiple beliefs, opinions, and norms result from increasing ethnic and religious diversity (Larson et al., 2002). Parents who have not experienced this diversity themselves may not be able to fully prepare their children to develop the skills necessary to function effectively in such communities. Schools may be the main context in which youth will learn about other ethnic, class, or religious groups. Although schools may teach about diversity and tolerance, such lessons are not likely to become integrated into a youth's repertoire of interpersonal skills unless the youth has a chance to act on and practice using this information in authentic, purposeful peer interactions.

In addition to addressing between-group cultural misunderstandings and stereotypes, youth development programs should structure opportunities for youth to reevaluate within-group stereotypes. Schools and other organizations can structure opportunities for peers within particular ethnic groups to reflect on how their interactions may complicate or enhance their own social or academic development. When peers within a cultural group

deliberately or unintentionally encourage their peers to conform to negative group stereotypes, academic as well as social development may be thwarted. One specific problem of within-culture stereotyping, found both in communities and in schools, is referred to as the "burden of acting white," or "racelessness" (Fordham, 1988). This is a within-group phenomenon in which peers influence one another to conform to group stereotypes. Sometimes, these behavioral expectations support an anti-intellectual identity and thereby constrain both within-group and between-group relationships. Such phenomena can be addressed through structured peer dialogues.

Reinforce Prosocial Behaviors and Conventional Norms

Both the Coca-Cola Valued Youth and Time Dollar programs structure activities that encourage youth to demonstrate prosocial behaviors and conventional norms (Fashola & Slavin, 1998). Prosocial behaviors reflect attention by youth to the needs of others and to the expectations of society. Conventional norms are those of societal institutions such as the school, family, and justice system (Jessor & Jessor, 1977). Tutors are trained in how to teach and are supported in their teaching efforts. Thus, tutors are taught a socially valued skill and reinforced for its application.

It is critical that peer interventions be carefully structured to promote prosocial behaviors and skill development and do not inadvertently lead to the reinforcement of antisocial behaviors. There is a growing consensus that peer-based interventions in which high-risk, antisocial, or delinquent youth are aggregated can actually facilitate or aggravate the development of problem behaviors when the peers in these interventions subvert conventional social norms (Catterall, 1987; Dishion et al., 1999). This unintended effect is known as *deviancy training,* which occurs when communication and interaction patterns among delinquent youth undermine conventional norms and reinforce antisocial behavior (Patterson, Dishion, & Yoerger, 2000). Various types of overt and covert peer behaviors can undermine otherwise successful interventions (e.g., Dishion, et al., 1999; Patterson et al., 2000). Even well-designed programs, such as the EQUIP program for juvenile offenders (Gibbs, Potter, & Goldstein, 1995), must be very carefully implemented not to inadvertently create a breeding ground for delinquency and antisocial behavior.

One step that can be taken to inhibit deviancy training in peer interventions is to include a balanced number of high- and low-risk youth in peer or group interventions. But including youth who differ in their risk status will help only if the interactions in that dyad or group are actively structured by adults to support conventional norms and to reinforce prosocial

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behaviors. It may be necessary to work directly with influential peers or with whole groups of youth themselves to get their commitment to avoid making antisocial or authority-undermining jokes, statements, and behaviors. When youth feel that refraining from undermining the program's goals will truly be helpful to others, such as to younger students in the group, and when refraining does not detract from their own status among their peers, even aggressive, delinquent, and underachieving youth may be inclined to be helpful. Beyond the peers themselves, it may be helpful (a) to work with parents and school administrators to better understand contextual or cultural variations in what constitutes antisocial behavior or (b) to create a committee of adults and/or peers to establish guidelines for the program and to make decisions about what is appropriate behavior (Portner, 2001). It also may be helpful to include or consult with psychologists or other professionals to identify problem behaviors specific to a culture, age, or particular peer group and to make suggestions for tailoring program activities to promote specific developmental goals (Lerner, De Stefanis, & Ladd, 1998).

Meet the Needs of Girls as Well as Boys

What may be an effective intervention for boys may not be as effective for girls. For example, a recent study of mentoring found that program effects depended on the development of a significant bond between mentors and mentees. Social discussions and recreational activities were more helpful than academically focused interactions in the development of this significant interpersonal relationship (DuBois, Neville, Parra, & Pugh-Lilly, 2002), yet overall, the effect of these interactions on the mentor's eventual significance to the mentee was greater for boys than for girls. Boys also tend to benefit more than girls from serving as tutors to younger children (Yogev & Ronen, 1982); yet girls are more likely to volunteer to participate as tutors or volunteers in service-learning projects and peer interventions (Stukas et al., 1999). One study of 374 children in 15 peer tutoring programs found that same-sex pairs were good for male tutors, male tutees, and female tutees but not for female tutors (Topping & Whiteley, 1993); female-male pairs were good for the female tutors but not for their male tutees. Peer support interventions appear to be especially helpful to teenage mothers (Rhodes, Ebert, & Fischer, 1992). Girls may need peer interventions that allow them to practice particular communication skills, such as refusal skills for managing sexual advances (Foshee et al., 1996; Way, 1995). Better understanding the dynamics involved in these differential outcomes presents important challenges for future researchers and program coordinators. When developing peer interventions, it is critical to consider

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how the intervention approach and goals will be received differently by boys and girls.

Types of Peer Intervention Programs

Some peer interventions, like peer mentoring or peer mediation, are stand-alone programs; others occur within larger intervention programs. In their review of 25 empirically supported, positive youth development programs, Catalano et al. (2002) describe no programs that were solely peer-helping-peer interventions, but five of the programs they describe have significant peer-helping-peer intervention components that present unique opportunities for developing prosocial interpersonal relationships among peers (Catalano et al., 2002; Dryfoos, 1990). These components include peer counseling, peer mediation, peer mentoring, peer tutoring, and peer teaching. In this section, we review each of these peer intervention components and briefly highlight peer components within larger interventions in schools.

Peer Counseling Without Direct Adult Guidance

Peer counseling is based on the idea that youth may best be understood by other youth and that peers often can be the most empathic with one another's experiences and provide the best suggestions to help other youth with their problems (Haszouri & Smith, 1991). Peer counseling has not received as much research attention as other peer interventions, and this may reflect the fact that allowing adolescents to counsel their peers may be unwise if they are not carefully supervised. Peer counselors without sufficient training, supervision, and personal maturity may do more harm than good.

Peer counseling has been recommended as particularly useful for youth of color (Gibbs, 1989; LaFromboise & Bigfoot, 1988). However, there is evidence that cross-race peer counseling requires additional training. One purpose of training should be to help peer counselors understand cultural differences in the use of direct versus indirect speech (Delpit, 1988) and of self-disclosure. For example, in a study of undergraduates engaged in peer counseling (Berg & Wright-Buckley, 1988), African American students felt more positively about their experiences and about their white peer counselors when the peer counselors were more self-disclosing.

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Pair Counseling With Direct Adult Guidance

Pair counseling, like peer counseling, is based on the philosophy that reciprocal interactions between youth provide unique catalysts for developmental growth (Selman et al., 1997). Unlike peer counseling, in duo- and pair counseling, neither youth is given "authority" over the other, and an adult counselor guides the intervention. Neither youth is seen solely as the counselor or the counselee. Both come to the interaction with their own problems and their own strengths, and usually they are similar in age and developmental maturity. The counselor's goal is to help them learn to interact more maturely and to better understand the importance of friendships (Selman & Schultz, 1990). Pair counseling has been shown to reduce externalizing behaviors and increase both perspective-taking and negotiation skills (Karcher & Lewis, 2002). The assumption is that if youth can be helped to develop a mature and satisfying relationship in the pair, then these skills can be generalized to other relationships (Karcher, 2002; Lieberman & Smith, 1991; Nakkula & Selman, 1991).

Pair counseling has been practiced primarily with older elementary school children and with middle school youth because it is oriented around play, and older youth usually prefer more verbal interventions. Pair counseling has been used with older youth in residential treatment contexts, in which their social skills deficits are typically more severe (Karcher & Lewis, 2002; Moody, 1997; Selman et al., 1997). Adult counselors also could use pair counseling to help adolescents in couples better understand how their individual behaviors affect their partners and their ongoing relationships and thereby increase the likelihood of satisfaction and success in their current and future relationships.

Peers as Mediators, Tutors, and Mentors

In peer mediation, peer tutoring, and peer mentoring, a clearly delineated, hierarchical relationship exists between the two peers. In the case of peer mentoring, often the youth differ in age; yet in peer mediation and peer tutoring, it is not uncommon for youth in the same grade to work with each other.

Peer Mediation

Peer mediation programs have grown steadily in popularity and number over the past 15 years and can be found in many school districts and in

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elementary, middle, and high schools (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Peer mediation is designed to provide two or more youth experiencing interpersonal conflicts some assistance from a trained peer before adult intervention becomes necessary. It can both reduce the demand for intervention by adults in the school and help students learn problem-solving skills. Peer mediators are trained to help the two youth in conflict to more effectively talk about their problems and generate mutually satisfactory resolutions to their problems. The mediators help the youth articulate their own unique perspectives and restate each other's points of view (Lane-Garon, 1998). One problem with peer mediation programs is that peers rarely request these services on their own. Therefore, principals, teachers, or other disciplinarians, who often are pressured to reach swift resolutions, must take time to promote this intermediate intervention option.

Youth receiving mediation from peers may benefit, first, from being able to resolve their immediate problems by reaching an agreed-upon solution, preventing enduring hostilities, and lessening future conflicts. For this reason, peer mediation programs have been incorporated into many larger violence prevention interventions in schools (Aber, Jones, Brown, Chaudry, & Samples, 1998). Second, youth have the opportunity to practice interpersonal skills they can later transfer to other contexts and relationships, and mediators often become more integrally involved in the school.

Peer Tutoring

Peer tutors help other students develop skills or learn information about a particular subject. Peer tutoring is less hierarchical in nature than peer mediation, and therefore youth may be more likely to request peer tutoring than peer mediation. Peer tutoring typically lasts longer than mediation, sometimes the course of an academic year.

Both the tutor and the tutee benefit socially and academically from peer tutoring (Greenwood, Delquadri, & Hall, 1989; Topping & Whiteley, 1993). Cross-age and peer tutoring provided by children in elementary school may not be as effective as tutoring from adolescent peer tutors (Jenkins, Jewell, Leicester, Jenkins, & Troutner, 1991), possibly because older youth better teach problem solving and explain difficult concepts.

Tutors need sufficient training both in how to present information and in how to communicate effectively with their tutees. Seventh graders who served as tutors to each other have demonstrated significantly greater learning when the tutors were trained to ask comprehension and thought-provoking questions and to explain the material effectively (King, Staffeiri, & Adelgais, 1998). In addition, the tutees trained to ask questions

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of their peer tutors learned more. Peer tutors have reported stronger bonding to school and increased self-esteem, empathy, and altruism after serving as tutors (Srebnik & Elias, 1993; Switzer, Simmons, Dew, Regalski, & Wang, 1995; Yogev & Ronen, 1982).

Some of the benefits of peer-tutoring programs result from the recruitment of tutors from populations of students who traditionally do not participate in tutoring programs. The Time Dollar program (described in the box above) operates in low-income school districts, and the Coca-Cola Valued Youth program targets at-risk students. Evaluations of the Coca-Cola Valued Youth program suggest that after participating, the tutors were more committed to school and felt better about school, as demonstrated by improved grades, reduced absenteeism, and lower dropout rates than a control group of similar students who did not participate in the program (Cardenas et al., 1992). Although the evaluation of the Time Dollar program did not specifically investigate its effect on tutors, anecdotal information suggests similar benefits for tutors from participating in its program, especially for tutors who came from special education classes, who had attention deficits, or who had past behavior problems in the school (Washington-Steward, 2000).

Peer and Cross-Age Mentoring

Because few youth view others of their same age as their mentors, cross-age mentoring is more common than same-age peer mentoring (Hamilton & Darling, 1989). Often, high school students mentor younger students, such as when a senior mentors a freshman or a high school student mentors a middle or elementary student (Dennison, 2000; Karcher, Davis, & Powell, 2002). However, same-age peer mentoring also has been conducted. Most often, this has been regular education with special education students, high-achieving with lower-achieving students, or delinquent with previously delinquent youths (Sheehan, DiCara, LeBailly, & Christoffel, 1999). As with other peer interventions, it appears that involvement as a peer mentor has the capacity to develop character and strengthen connectedness to school (Karcher & Lindwall, in press; Sheehan et al., 1999; Srebnik & Elias, 1993) as well as to discourage youth involvement in risk-taking behavior outside of school (McNamara, 2000). The main factors of effective mentoring appear to be not the age of the mentor, but the degree of support, training, supervision, and guidance mentors are provided for their work. For both adults and youth mentors, mentors who receive ongoing training and supervision have a bigger impact than those who do not (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002).

School-Based Peer Intervention Programs

Schools are a primary context in which one can enlist youth to work with peers in youth development activities and programs. Although most of the youth development programs described by Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster (1998) are community based, it appears that most of the youth development programs that truly utilize peers as agents of change occur within the school. Peer interventions that provide leadership, facilitator, mediator, tutor, and mentor roles can be found in several contexts within the school. Some peer interventions occur among pairs of youth, while other peer interventions occur within larger group or classroom contexts. Others take place outside the classroom, either during or after school.

Developing positive peer relations is critical to newcomers in every school. A significant need among youth transitioning into new schools and communities is the opportunity to meet, interact with, and develop social bonds with peers, particularly for youth with disabilities, low self-esteem, or poor social skills (Cornille, Bayer, & Smyth, 1983). The STEP (School Transitional Environment Project program) (Felner et al., 1993) attempts to reorganize peer relationships and facilitate a sense of connectedness to peers transitioning to a new school. This is done by organizing the school environment and schedule to create a small community within the school in which peers become more familiar with one another and minimize negative interactions with upperclassmen.

Numerous youth intervention and school guidance curricula involve peer interaction activities designed to reduce problem behaviors (e.g., substance use or violence) or promote specific types of skills (e.g., refusal skills, negotiation skills training). These have been summarized elsewhere (Catalano et al., 2002; Roth et al., 1998). The Teen Outreach Program (Allen, Kuperminc, Philliber, & Herre, 1994) uses a cross-age teaching experience to affect positive growth in middle and high school students. The BrainPower Program (Hudley & Friday, 1996) and the Anger Coping Program (Lochman, Dunn, & Klimesdougan, 1993) enlist youth to help their peers explore and correct their misattributions and thereby help youth become more empathic, sophisticated in their social perspective taking, and effective in negotiating. In fact, many youth programs that involve peer components target critical problems in peer relations and social skills, such as the attribution biases of aggressive youth, poor negotiation skills, limited empathy and perspective taking, intergroup hostilities, difficulty interpreting nonverbal communication cues, and inadequate self-management and problem-solving skills (e.g., Embry, Flannery, Vazsonyi, Powell, & Atha, 1996).

Many large-scale intervention programs attempt to capitalize on the power and influence of peer interactions. Although the core purpose of these programs may not be to develop positive peer relations, the programs create structured opportunities for youths to have a positive impact on their peers en route to achieving other developmental goals. Two examples of such programs are the Adolescent Transitions Project and Project Northland.

Peer Interventions in Schools

The Adolescent Transitions Program. A comprehensive prevention program aimed at middle-school-aged teens, the Adolescent Transitions Project works with parents, schools, and young teens to prevent problem behaviors by developing individual skills and changing the school environment (Dishion, Kavanagh, Schneiger, Nelson, & Kaufman, 2002). Although largely curriculum based, the program contains a peer component in which adolescents meet weekly in groups of six to eight participants for 12 sessions. An adult counselor meets with these groups of adolescents to give the teens a chance to learn, discuss, and practice social skills. In addition to the adult counselor, the groups also involve a peer counselor, usually a high school student who has successfully completed the Adolescents Transitions Program. The peer counselor acts as a role model for the younger teens and as a bridge between the younger teens and the adult counselor. Sometimes, the peer counselor attempts to connect with youth disliked by the rest of group and helps involve them in the group.

Project Northland. A comprehensive intervention program that aims to delay the onset of and reduce the use of alcohol by adolescents, Project Northland works with schools, communities, and the media to influence community norms associated with the demand, supply, and availability of alcohol among adolescents (Williams et al., 1999). Project Northland is implemented in phases, addressing the demand for alcohol in Phase 1 and the supply of alcohol in Phase 2. In both phases, adolescents are recruited to assist in affecting community norms. In Phase 1, middle school teens are helped to plan, organize, and promote alcohol-free social events for their peers. These teens are given a 1-day leadership training session that teaches them the skills they need to develop the social activities. In Phase 2, high

school teens are recruited to work with part-time adult coordinators to form youth action teams. In addition to having the same mandate as the middle school youth leaders to plan alcohol-free alternative social activities, the youth action teams also participate in other activities that affect the community norms concerning alcohol use by adolescents, for example, by producing community-specific videos about adolescent alcohol use and its negative consequences.

Levels of Involvement

The impact that the youth components of these programs have on their participants appears to depend on the adolescent's level of involvement. Although the comprehensive Adolescent Transitions Program (ATP) has resulted in several positive outcomes for youth, involvement in the ATP peer group component had a detrimental effect on some youth (Andrews, Soberman, & Dishion, 1995; Dishion et al., 1999). Instead of reinforcing positive social skills, the peer group meetings provided a venue for deviancy training, in which members reinforced each other's negative behaviors. However, teens who went beyond simply attending the meetings and developed close relationships with their peer counselors exhibited fewer problem behaviors at the conclusion of the program than teens with more distant relationships with their peer counselors (Andrews et al., 1995; Dishion et al., 2001).

Similarly, the effects of Project Northland appear to depend on the youth's level of involvement in the program. Overall, the program appeared to reduce the tendency of participating youth to use alcohol compared with control group youth not receiving the intervention, but the level of involvement that adolescents had in the program had an additional effect (Komro & Perry, 1996). For example, after participating, the youth leaders and the youth action teams (who planned the activities) exhibited a lower tendency to use alcohol than teens who had only attended the activities.

Structured and Voluntary Participation

Both the ATP and Project Northland illustrate that the peer components of these programs are more successful when participation is structured and voluntary. The youth leaders in Project Northland, although recruited by adults, volunteer their time and effort. Youth who volunteer are given a clear and concise goal: to reduce the use of alcohol by teens by affecting

community norms associated with drinking. In addition to receiving training in planning social activities, youth leaders rely on support and suggestions from school staff. The skills, support, and clear mandate that the youth are given to guide their efforts allow the teens to better focus their time and energy into social activities that are incompatible with alcohol use.

Opportunities to Learn and Use Prosocial Behaviors

The impact of promoting prosocial behaviors is clearly illustrated in Project Northland and ATP. Adolescents who either become youth leaders or members of the youth action teams are provided the opportunity and support they need to have a positive impact on their peers. Youth involved in the peer component of Project Northland go beyond the classroom curriculum to teaching the dangers of adolescent alcohol use. The youth leaders do not simply learn about the dangers associated with adolescent alcohol use but also gain skills that enable them to address the problem in positive ways, such as by planning and promoting alcohol-free social activities for their peers. The youth action team members can even have an impact on the community beyond that of their peers, such as by addressing policies concerning the sale of alcohol at community events, bringing speakers to educate individuals on the negative effects of adolescent alcohol use, and creating community-specific videos about adolescent alcohol use. Thus, the prosocial skills that the youth leaders learn through participating in Project Northland can have a positive effect on their peers, their community, and their own developing identities.

Conclusions

The evolving definition for youth development programs should be expanded to include peers as catalysts rather than solely as targets of growth. In this review of peer interventions, we have highlighted the numerous opportunities available to include youth who serve as leaders, guides, and facilitators to influence the development of their peers and younger youth through mentoring, tutoring, mediating, and teaching. Adults can facilitate developmental intervention programs that help peers to support one another, model and encourage one another's social skills development, and facilitate interpersonal understanding across age, gender, cultural and peer groups. Adults can guide peers within larger programs and activities to have a positive influence on one another's development. However, program coordinators must consider not only tacit, direct, and indirect peer influences but also the likelihood that negative peer influences may undermine the

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promotion of conventional, prosocial behaviors in their programs. Nevertheless, the advantages of enlisting peers as resources in youth development programs are great and often go untapped, and suggest that peer interventions should be included whenever possible.

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