

Promoting Positive Peer Relationships: A Sample of Recent References*

As the literature stresses, peers play a role in social development and learning related to empathy, caring, social responsibility, negotiation, persuasion, cooperation, compromise, emotional control, conflict resolution, and more. Peers also provide social and emotional support and are socialization agents who model and mold others' behaviors and beliefs and solidify their own. The impact of peers begins with early learning.

Peer relationships at school can facilitate or be a barrier to learning and teaching. Peer relationships can also function as helping interventions. Schools play both a passive and active role.

To highlight all this and to add to the resources already on our Center's website, below is an annotated sample of references. Most of the annotations are edited excerpts from authors' abstracts and introductions.

Developing Peer Relationships at School

- >Peer relationships: Promoting positive peer relationships during childhood (2014), C.A. Rohrbeck & L.S. Gray. In T.P. Gullotta & M. Bloom (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Primary Prevention and Health Promotion*. New York: Springer.
http://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-1-4614-5999-6_137

With regard to prevention and health promotion, peer relationships may be viewed as a valued outcome in their own right. In addition, positive and negative peer relationships can predict later adaptive and problematic outcomes, respectively. Finally, peer relationships can also serve as risk or protective factors in the relationships among other variables, especially relationships between stressors (e.g., victimization) and outcomes such as depression. This resource provides an overview of strategies, programs with research support and those that are considered promising.

- >Promoting positive peer relationships (2008), H.Ming-tak. In H. Ming-tak & L. Wai-shing (Eds.), *Classroom management: Creating a positive learning environment*. Hong Kong University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5790/hongkong/9789622098886.003.0007>

This chapter highlights (a) the importance of good peer relationships in students' personal growth and academic success, (b) describes how students' conceptions of friendship change from primary to secondary education, and (c) outlines the characteristics of popular students. Some basic practices for promoting students' popularity are given, with a practical framework for helping students with peer problems to take a new perspective and develop new patterns of behaviour for improving their relationships. Lastly, teachers can take a proactive approach in promoting positive peer relationships among students in the classroom by developing strategies in the following areas: teaching social-emotional skills, conflict-resolution skills and problem-solving skills; getting students to learn in groups; and creating a classroom climate of positive peer relationships.

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- >Developing positive relationships in schools (2011), S. Roffey. In S. Roffey (Ed.), *Positive relationships: Evidence based practice across the world*. New York: Springer.
http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-007-2147-0_9

Positive relationships in schools are central to the well-being of both students and teachers and underpin an effective learning environment. There is now a wealth of research on the importance of connectedness in schools and on the specific qualities of in-school relationships that promote effective education. This chapter demonstrates that these are based in an ecological framework throughout the school system. What happens in one part of the school impacts on what happens elsewhere. The chapter explores what schools might do to increase the level of social capital and positive relationships within the school community.

- >Peer relationships as a context for the development of school engagement during early adolescence (2011), L. Yibing, A.D. Lynch, C. Kalvin, J. Liu, & R.M. Lerner, *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 35, 329–342.
<http://jbd.sagepub.com/content/35/4/329.short>

Peer support positively predicted behavioral and emotional school engagement, whereas associating with problem-behaving friends and bullying involvement were negatively associated with both aspects of school engagement. When students were older, the positive influences of positive peer support on emotional engagement appeared stronger. Similarly, the negative influences of associating with problem-behaving friends on behavioral engagement became more detrimental over time. While girls and youth of higher family socioeconomic status (SES) tended to be more behaviorally and emotionally engaged than boys and youth from less advantaged families, the influences of time and peer relationships on school engagement were not different for boys and girls or for youth with different family SES backgrounds. Implications for understanding peer relations as a context for promoting school engagement are discussed.

- >Teachers' attunement to students' peer group affiliations as a source of improved student experiences of the school social–affective context following the middle school transition (2011), J.V. Hamm, T.W. Farmer, K. Dadisman, M. Gravelle, & A.R. Murray, *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 32, 267–277. <http://ac.els-cdn.com/>

A randomized control trial examined the impact of a professional development program on rural teachers' attunement to student social dynamics, and the influence of teacher attunement on students' school experiences. Students self-reported their perceptions of the school social–affective context. Intervention and control schools differed on teacher attunement and management of the social environment. Students whose teachers were more attuned to peer group affiliations evidenced improved views of the school social environment. Findings are discussed in terms of attunement as an element of teachers' invisible hand, and for teachers' role in promoting productive contexts for students during the middle school transition.

- >Getting along: How teachers can support children's peer relationships (1997), K. M. Kemple & L. Hartle, *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 24, 139-146. doi:10.1007/BF02353270

Outlines the following set of practices for schools to encourage positive peer interactions.

1. Foster a safe and respected emotional environment (democratic style of discipline, frequent use of children's name to help students recognize and memorize each other; lead discussion about individual interest and experience so that students can have a better understanding of each other and identification of shared interest; participate and guide in conversation to help children realize how they differ from each other)
2. Provide a suitable physical place (large enough to accommodate a group of students, provide adequate equipment such as tables, chairs, books, or snacks, provide a safe play area outside classroom)

3. Prepare accessible materials for all students to choose, and equipment that support children's social activities (provide materials that can meet students' interests, e.g., teachers can provide many color pencils and white papers to students who are interested in painting)
4. Set up a schedule that allows for some free time to play (frequent change of schedule is not good for students to engage in social play; snack time is a good practice for students to talk and share food; teachers can participate during snack time to "model, guide, and encourage polite conversation" and sharing behavior)
5. Observe and help solve the conflicts (teachers do not need to engage in students' activities but are encouraged to observe them; if there are conflicts or bullying behaviors, teachers need to help solve these problems; if teachers' support is needed, especially during interaction among disabled students, teachers should step in and guide the interactions; discuss with students about when they had conflicts with others and how should they solve these problems).

>Friendships, peer acceptance, and group membership: Relations to academic achievement in middle school (1997). K.R. Wentzel & K. Caldwell, *Child Development*, 65, 1198-1209.
http://www.jstor.org/stable/1132301?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

Examines the correlation among between peer relationships and middle school students' academic performance. The three aspects of peer relationships addressed are reciprocal friendship, group membership, and peer acceptance. Some of the results:

1. There was a significant relation between peer acceptance and GPA in sixth grade. Peer acceptance was also significantly correlated with reciprocal friendship in sixth grade.
2. As for girls, groups membership was correlated with both six and seventh grade GPA. There was also a significant relation between peer acceptance and sixth and seventh grade GPA.
3. For boys, all three peer variables, except for reciprocal friendship, can predicate GPA in sixth grade.
4. For both boys and girls, there was a significant and positive relationship between peer acceptance and reciprocal friendship.
5. For girls, reciprocal friendship was significantly correlated with emotional distress in sixth and eighth grade.
6. For boys, eighth grade GPA was positively correlated with prosocial behavior and peer acceptance during middle school year, and negatively linked with sixth and eighth grade antisocial behavior.
7. For girls, there was a significant correlation between group membership and peer acceptance, antisocial behavior in sixth grade, and reciprocal friendship.
8. For boys, there was a significant link between group membership and sixth grade antisocial behavior, eighth grade emotional distress and prosocial behavior.
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1747938X13000122>

>A meta-analysis of the effects of face-to-face cooperative learning. Do recent studies falsify or verify earlier findings? E. Kyndt, E. Raes, B. Lismont, F. Timmers, E. Cascallar, & F. Dochy (2013). *Educational Research Review* 10, 133–149.

One of the major conclusive results of the research on learning in formal learning settings of the past decades is that cooperative learning has shown to evoke clear positive effects on different variables. Therefore this meta-analysis has two principal aims. First, it tries to replicate, based on recent studies, the research about the main effects of cooperative learning on three categories of outcomes: achievement, attitudes and perceptions. The second aim is to address potential moderators of the effect of cooperative learning. In total, 65 articles met the criteria for inclusion: studies from 1995 onwards on cooperative learning in primary, secondary or tertiary education conducted in real-life classrooms. This meta-analysis reveals a positive effect of cooperative learning on achievement and attitudes. In the second part of

the analysis, the method of cooperative learning, study domain, age level and culture were investigated as possible moderators for achievement. Results show that the study domain, the age level of the students and the culture in which the study took place are associated with variations in effect size.

For more links to resources on developing peer relationships, see the Center's Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds on:

- >Peer Relationships –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/peersupport.htm>
- >Social and Emotional Development and Social Skills –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2102_05.htm
- >Classroom and School Climate/Culture --
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/environments.htm>
- >Youth Culture & Subgroups --
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/youthculture.htm>

Peer Relationships and Bullying

>White House report/bullying—and the power of peers (2011). P.C. Rodkin, *Promoting Respectful Schools*, 69, 10-16.

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept11/vol69/num01/Bullying%E2%80%94And-the-Power-of-Peers.aspx>

Articulates the nature of bullying and examines the bully-victim relationship. Discusses the “two social worlds” of bullying: *marginalization* ("may be fighting against a social system that keeps them on the periphery") and *connection* ("may use aggression to control" peers). Also discusses what kind of peer relationships are likely to contribute to bullying and what methods students and teachers can use to prevent bullying.

>Bystander motivation in bullying incidents: To intervene or not to intervene? (2012). R. Thornberg, L. Tenenbaum, K. Varjas, J. Meyers, T. Jungert, & G. Vanegas, *Western Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 8, 247-252. doi: 10.5811/westjem.2012.3.11792

Proposes a framework of bystander motivation to intervene when bullying occurs. Framework includes five motive domains: (1) interpretation of harm in the bullying situation, (2) emotional reactions, (3) social evaluating, (4) moral evaluating, and (5) intervention self-efficacy.

>*Why kids choose not to intervene during bullying situation* (2013). S. Whitson, *Psychology Today*. Online <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/passive-aggressive-diaries/201310/why-kids-choose-not-to-intervene-during-bullying-situations>

Offers six reasons why students decide not to intervene when they see peers being bullied:

1. Diffusion of responsibility: students feel that teachers and adults will intervene the bullying and it is not their responsibility to do it. However, a lot of bullying happens when adults are absent. Teachers should teach students that they have the responsibility to intervene the bullying.
2. Students are afraid that the bully will turn on to them if they stand out. Adults should teach kids that their action can positively influence the bullied while minimally affecting themselves.

3. When the bully is their friends, students decide not to intervene even though they do not like what he or she does. Teachers should let kids know that a healthy friendship will bear some disagreements.
4. Students will not intervene bullying when the bullied is not their friends. Teachers should teach students to build up empathy to the bullied so that they are more likely to help.
5. Most students want to “be normal” so they do not want to stand out.
6. Students do not know what they should do to stop the bullying.

>Vulnerable children in varying classroom contexts: Bystanders' behaviors moderate the effects of risk factors on victimization (2010). A. Kärnä, M. Voeten, E. Poskiparta, & C. Salmivalli, *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 56, 261-282. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23098070>

Examines the effect of bystanders’ actions on bullying across different classroom contexts. Reports that social anxiety and classmate rejection are predictors of victimization. In classrooms where bystanders reinforce bullying, socially anxious and rejected students are in higher risk of victimization. But in classroom where bystanders defend the bullied, there is some negative influence on bullies and the victimization is negatively reinforced.

>Tapping into the power of school climate to prevent bullying: One application of schoolwide positive behavior interventions and support (2014). K. Bosworth, & M. Judkins, *Theory Into Practice*, 53, 300-307, DOI: 10.1080/00405841.2014.947224

Points to school climate as an important influence on students’ pro-social and anti-social behaviors. Students with a less favorable view of school are seen as tending to feel insecure and disconnected, and more likely to view teachers and classmates as unfriendly. Their negative perception of school can lead to aggressive and anti-social behaviors at school. Emphasizes three factors as crucial for schools in preventing bullying behaviors: (1) structure and support, (2) positive relationship, and (3) norms and policies.

For more links to resources on bullying, see the Center’s Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds on:

>*Bullying* --

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/bully.htm>

>*Gangs* –

http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p3009_01.htm

>*Conflict Resolution in Schools* –

http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2108_02.htm

>*Youth Culture & Subgroups* --

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/youthculture.htm>

I see that bully stole your lunch again.

Well, this time he’s in for a surprise, unless he likes broccoli and tofu.



Peer Relationships as a Helping Intervention

> *The impact of positive peer relationships, school experiences, and future outlook on behavior scores for abused and neglected youth* (2015). D.H. Merritt & S.M. Snyder, Society for Social Work and Research conference
<https://sswr.confex.com/sswr/2015/webprogram/Paper24337.html>

Much of the research concerning peer networks of children focuses on risk factors, such as peer rejection and victimization as related to subsequent delinquency, substance abuse, and deviant peer affiliation as young adults. This research takes a strength-based approach to assess the predictive impact of self-reported accounts of positive peer friendships, school experiences, and future expectations on levels of problem behaviors, including an assessment of the interaction between positive experiences and maltreatment type. These findings are useful for treatment approaches that focus on self- perceived accounts of positive friendship networks, experiences in school and future expectations. Types of abuse clearly have a differential impact on behaviors when consideration is given to the protective influences of positive networks, experiences, and future .

> Peer acceptance and friendship as predictors of early adolescents' adjustment across the middle school transition (2011). J.N. Kingery, & C.A. Erdley, &K.C. Marshall, *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 57(3), 215-243.

http://www.jhu.edu/journals/merrill-palmer_quarterly/v057/57.3.kingery.html

Findings indicate

1. High correlations between peer acceptance and number of friends, and significant correlations between peer acceptance and friendship quality.
 2. The regression models predicting loneliness, self-esteem, school involvement, and academic achievement were significant.
 3. Peer acceptance declined significantly across the transition for both boys and girls, while the average number of mutual friendships increased significantly across the transition for boys and girls.
 4. Loneliness, depression, and school avoidance decreased for both boys and girls, whereas self-esteem increased from the spring of fifth grade to the fall of sixth grade.
- > *Influence of peer social experiences on positive and negative indicators of mental health among high school students* (2015). S.M. Suldo, C.D. Gelley, R.A. Roth, & L.P. Bateman, *Psychology in the Schools* 52, 431–446. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pits.21834/full>

Examined associations between peer relationships (victimization and receipt of prosocial acts) and multiple indicators of mental health that represent subjective well-being (i.e., life satisfaction, positive and negative affect) and psychopathology (general internalizing symptoms and externalizing problems—aggressive behavior) among 500 high school students in Grades 9 to 11. Peer experiences explained the most variance in positive affect and internalizing psychopathology. Different types of peer experiences drove these effects, with relational victimization particularly salient to internalizing psychopathology and prosocial acts by peers most predictive of positive affect. Moderation analyses indicated that peers' prosocial acts did not serve a protective role in the associations between victimization and mental health. Instead, the presence of overt victimization negated the positive associations between prosocial acts and good mental health (high life satisfaction, low internalizing psychopathology). Understanding these associations illuminates the range of student outcomes possibly impacted by victimization and suggests that both limiting peer victimization and facilitating positive peer experiences may be necessary to facilitate complete mental health among high school students.

- >Peer Group Connection (PGC) for High Schools (nd). *High School Juniors and Seniors Supporting Freshmen in Their Transition to High School*, Center for Supportive Schools. <http://supportiveschools.org/solutions/peer-group-connection/>

Through its Peer Group Connection (PGC) program, the Center for Supportive Schools trains school faculty to teach leadership courses to select groups of older students, who in turn educate and support younger students. The goal is “to help schools enable and inspire young people to become engaged leaders who positively influence their peers. The CSS peer-to-peer student leadership model taps into schools’ most underutilized resources – students – and enlists them in strengthening the educational offerings of a school while simultaneously advancing their own learning, growth, and development.” The high school transition program is an evidence-based program that taps into high school juniors and seniors to create a nurturing environment for incoming freshmen. “Once per week, pairs of junior and senior peer leaders meet with groups of 10-14 freshmen in outreach sessions designed to strengthen relationships among students across grades. These peer leaders are simultaneously enrolled in a daily, for-credit, year-long leadership course taught by school faculty during regular school hours. PGC is CSS’s seminal peer leadership program, and has been implemented with a 70% sustainability rate in more than 175 high schools since 1979. A recently released, four-year longitudinal, randomized-control study conducted by Rutgers University and funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services found that, among other major results, PGC improves the graduation rates of student participants in an inner city public school by ten percentage points and cuts by half the number of male students who would otherwise drop out.”

- > Peer acceptance if included students with disabilities as a function of severity of disability and classroom composition (1999). B.G. Cook, & M.I. Semmel, *The Journal of Special Education*, 33, 50-61.

Investigated how severity of disability (mild or severe) and classroom composition (heterogeneous and non-heterogeneous) affect the acceptance of included students with disabilities. Results suggest that peers are more likely to and better accept included students with severe disabilities if they are included in non-heterogeneous classroom. However, students with mild disabilities are better accepted by peers in heterogeneous classroom.

- >Effective intervention with urban at risk secondary English Language Learners: A case study using peer teachers in an innovative summer course (2012). L. Gerena, & L. Keiler. *The Bilingual Research Journal*, 35, 76-97. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15235882.2012.667372#.Va1Z3bXn9IA>

The Peer Enabled Restructured Classroom (PERC) program is a peer-teaching model developed by the Math and Science Partnership in New York City (MSPinNYC) to help underachieving and historically at-risk urban students succeed in math and science courses. Although preliminary success of this program has been substantial, there has not been a consistent investigation of the model's impact with participating ELL/F-ELLs. The focus of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the model with ELL/F-ELLs in a five-week summer program. Although peer-instructors received a three-day orientation and daily seminars, they were not specifically trained in ELL/F-ELL strategies. Questions investigated in this study were: Do bilingual TAS make use of the approaches, behaviors, and strategies that are consistent with the research on second language and content learning? Does the use of the native language by the bilingual TAS, those with linguistic abilities to clarify information, to answer questions and to promote higher level thinking in the primary language, help ELL/F-ELL students to process challenging content area curriculum and achieve academic success? Data based on test results, surveys, interviews, and observations were analyzed. Results indicate success with ELL/F-ELL students but with much underutilized potential.

- > Peer-Assisted Learning strategies for English language learners with learning disabilities (2005). L.M. Saenz, L.S. Fuchs, & D. Fuchs, *Council for Exception Children*, 71, 231-247.

Examines the correlation between peer assisted learning strategy and reading performance of Spanish-speaking who have learning disabilities. These non-English speaking students are paired with low-, average-, and high-achieving peers. A reading task that contains both word question and reading comprehension question is given to students to indicate their reading performance. Scores before and after the treatment are measured to see the improvement. Teachers and students also answered the questionnaires on their experiences about the treatment. The results of word questions showed the main effect of treatment on students' performance is not significant, neither is the main effect of student type. There is no significant interaction either. As for the comprehension questions, we get similar results except that there is a significant effect of treatment. However, both teachers and students have positive experience on this learning strategy, indicating that they think such strategy is effective and they are benefited from it.

- > Comparison of effectiveness of several peer learning programs to support 1st year Chemistry (2014). K. Taylor, & T. Kelly, *The Australian Conference on Science and Mathematics Education, University of Sydney*. 89-90.

Compared three kinds of peer learning program to see their influence on 1st year students' chemistry performance. The three kinds of peer program are: interactive lectures held by a Chemistry tutor and several peer mentors, chemistry study session led by peer mentors, and online study session with peer mentors. The results were compared: the interactive lecture has the biggest effect on students' Chemistry performance, followed sequentially by face-to-face peer study session and online peer session.

For more links to resources on bullying, see the Center's Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds on:

>Peer Relationships –

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/peersupport.htm>

>Social and Emotional Development and Social Skills –

http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2102_05.htm

>Classroom and School Climate/Culture --

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/environments.htm>

>Youth Culture & Subgroups --

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/youthculture.htm>

>Conflict Resolution in Schools –

http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2108_02.htm

Note: Too often lost in discussing the development and impact of peer relationships is the voice of young people. See *Youth Participation: Making It Real*.

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/youthpartic.pdf>