

Category: Peer Collaboration

Peer Mentoring programme for students



Toolkit
**Successful Learning
Practices for
All Children to Thrive**



POLICIES AND PRACTICES BASED ON SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH FOR REDUCING UNDERACHIEVEMENT AND EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING IN EUROPE



Red Barnet, MHPSS Collaborative



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Introduction

This toolkit, “Successful Learning Practices for All Children to Thrive,” is a practical resource that shows how to create successful learning environments in classrooms, schools, and communities. It helps teachers and school leaders build effective learning spaces that improve basic skills, support struggling students, and develop children’s social and emotional skills. The toolkit is based on 20 case studies from 9 European countries, offering practical strategies that have worked in real schools.

These case studies come from primary and secondary schools across Europe that have successfully helped underachieving students and prevented early school leaving. The research was conducted in diverse schools across Portugal, Ireland, Finland, Denmark, Spain, Greece, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Malta. From these schools, we gathered concrete practices that improve both academic learning and social-emotional development.

The toolkit is organised around five key areas of successful learning environments:

Pedagogies

Teacher and Student Interaction

Peer Collaboration

School – Family – Community
Collaboration

Wellbeing and Support

While each tool is placed in one of these areas, many tools work across multiple areas. For instance, “Interactive Groups” not only helps students work together but also connects with the community, supports wellbeing, and improves academic results.

It’s important to understand that the most successful schools use multiple tools together. While each tool can help on its own, the best results come from working on all five areas across the whole school. We recommend looking at your school’s current strengths and areas for improvement to help you choose the most useful tools for your situation.

This toolkit is available as an online platform in seven languages: Spanish, Portuguese, English, Finnish, Maltese, Greek, and Italian. All the tools have been carefully tested and developed through dialogic co-creation with nearly 1,000 participants in the SCIREARLY project, including school staff, students, families, and community members.

Our aim is to give educators and communities the tools they need to help every child succeed in school. By sharing successful practices from different learning environments in an accessible way, we’re working to create schools where all children can thrive, regardless of their background.





Glossary

A glossary section is essential in this toolkit to provide clear definitions of key terms and concepts, ensuring that all users, including teachers, school leaders, education experts, policymakers, and community members, can fully understand and effectively implement the successful teaching and learning practices. This section helps bridge any gaps in terminology and ensures consistent understanding, making it easier to apply the evidence-based strategies and improve educational outcomes for students.

Dialogic Teaching and Learning

Dialogic teaching and learning emphasises dialogue and quality interactions as the primary means of achieving understanding, learning and development. A dialogic approach to teaching and learning aims at creating an environment where all students, teachers and other members of the community actively engage in meaningful and respectful dialogue. Here are some of the key premises:

Ensuring that everybody's voice is valued equally, and everyone has the opportunity to contribute to the dialogue. This encourages diverse perspectives and ensures that all voices are heard.

Recognising and valuing the cultural backgrounds and experiences of all students and teachers. This helps to create a more inclusive and understanding learning environment.

Dialogic interactions among students, teacher-student and within the community are oriented towards transforming the sociocultural context and create optimal conditions for learning and development.

Co-constructing meaning and understanding through dialogues between students and teachers. This collaborative process helps deepen comprehension and retention of information.



Building a sense of community and mutual support among students and teachers. This principle fosters collaboration and collective responsibility for learning.

Respecting and valuing differences among students and teachers. Dialogue should celebrate diversity and use it as a resource for learning. Encouraging critical thinking and challenging everyone to think deeply and question assumptions.

Emotional Dimension

Recognising the importance of quality relationships in learning. Successful practices create a supportive environment where students and teachers feel safe, supported and confident to express their emotions and experiences.

Authentic Learning

Ensuring that the dialogue and learning are relevant to the students' and teachers' real-life experiences and contexts. This makes the learning more meaningful and applicable.

Translanguaging

When one person speaks in one language while another person responds in another.

Reception Classes

Classes where children with another mother tongue are in specialised classes where translanguaging is used to help children learn the host country language - with the intention that the children enter mainstream education as they gain language proficiency.



Peer Mentoring programme for students



Overview:

The main aim of the peer mentoring programme is for students to help each other by one student performing well in a subject supporting another student to do well.

This programme is aimed at students between the ages of 10 and 18, although it can also be developed with younger students (between the ages of 6 and 10). It is important that the student mentors are further on with their study of the subject so that they are comfortable with the subjects they are helping younger or less knowledgeable students with.

This tool can be applied in the context of a school cluster or in specific classes or school cohorts, according to the interests and availability of supervising teachers. It is a promising approach because it can support students in different situations of vulnerability or difficulty, engage students in different roles, and strengthen relationships in the school. Peer mentoring can also encourage students to offer mutual help, share difficulties, and provide help with learning to students from different school years. It encourages students to take responsibility, help each other and share knowledge.





Implementation Steps:

Preparation:

- School managers must ask students and teachers how interested and motivated they are to be part of a mentoring programme. To do this, they must make the time available to participating students and teachers so that students can take part in the mentoring programme and have sufficient support and supervision from teachers from different subject areas.
- School education staff (such as psychologists) should be involved in the pairing process between students and teachers, and monitoring and following up the mentoring programme. They can also contribute strategies to motivate students and support their participation and listen to students throughout the mentoring programme.
- The school should also create the physical and material conditions (e.g., a room or library with a dedicated space) so students can concentrate on running the mentoring programme.

Implementation:

- The mentoring programme should last one school year and should be renewed each school year so that students from different school years and in different school subjects can participate;
- The choice of pairings should take into account the subject area that a mentee has the most significant difficulties with and which subject areas a student mentor may be most motivated to help with. The process should focus on clarifying doubts and improving understanding, in a spirit of mutual help and integration between the student mentors and the mentees;
- Mentors and mentees should keep a mentoring diary so that teachers can follow up on any difficulties and intervene when necessary;
- Peer mentoring can include preparing students for assessment periods, to improve school results, especially in critical subject areas;
- Consider the availability and motivation of teachers to accompany student pairings and monitor the programme in the school;
- Stipulate a maximum number of students per mentor, so that student mentors are not overloaded and to guarantee the programme is manageable;
- Ensure participation in the mentoring programme is voluntary, and students are supported and encouraged and appreciated for engaging in this programme.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

Reflective practice brings many benefits and so monitoring and evaluation should be carried out from a qualitative perspective and to seek improvements. To this end, we propose:

- Creating expectations between mentor and mentee by drawing up a document that sets out the responsibilities of participating in the programme for one academic year and sets limits regarding the maximum number of mentees per mentor (typically around 2 to 3 students). These documents should be co-created with mentors and mentees regarding issues that matter to them in that relationship;
- Weekly completion of the mentoring diary;
- Monthly or bi-monthly monitoring and evaluation by the teachers (and other professionals) responsible for the programme or the subject areas covered, together with the participating students (mentors and mentees);
- Setting up procedures to communicate and report difficulties in the mentoring process, whether related to learning or interpersonal relationships and establishing procedures to address them. This will ensure the effectiveness of the programme and the timely resolution of problems;
- At the end of the school year, the programme should be evaluated (a self-evaluation process), allowing for constructive reflection and an assessment of the participation and contributions of colleagues;
- Contextually relevant ways should be found to value the involvement of mentors and mentees.



Examples and Case Studies:

In a case study of a school cluster using a peer mentoring programme, there is a mentor-mentee relationship between peers in which a student with more competence in a particular subject is available to support and study with a student with more difficulties in that subject. This process is monitored by the school cluster's social education professionals and by teachers.

Excerpts from a focus group interview with secondary school students acting as mentors illustrate their views regarding school support and the mentoring programme,

M.: "It's not that D. has difficulties, but I like to help, and we end up studying together, and we usually have mentoring on Tuesdays and Fridays at lunchtime.

We always study the subjects for the test we have coming up, and in the end, not only does she study, but I also end up revising the subjects".

D.: (...) "That's what I'm doing with my mentor, but in Portuguese, I'm giving her the grammar she doesn't know; she should have known it from other years.

(...)

D. Yes, it forces me to study when I teach".

M.: "We chose it; I chose to mentor her because she asked me to, in her case. But usually, the older students sign up to mentor, and then the teachers and other teachers mentor the mentors. Usually, it's from the second cycle, that is, (...) for example, a 10th grader might be helping a 5th or 6th grader, probably like that."

It seems that students in this school identify the practice as voluntary, agentic, and mutually beneficial. They also see it as supporting their relationship with each other and with the subjects they are learning and facilitating. Commonly, as the final student points out, older students are mentors to younger students, while they are themselves supported by teachers in their mentoring role. This chain of support creates the structure for the practice.

One challenge of peer mentoring is that it cannot of the challenges encountered implies clarifying the challenges that mentors and mentees may face and make it explicit for them that the mentoring programme may not be able to solve all the students' problems/doubts or difficulties, and therefore, the student mentor should:

- Ask for help from a teacher or class director who is accompanying the mentoring programme whenever necessary;
- Record any problems or difficulties encountered in the mentoring diary;
- Tell the teacher in charge or head teacher if they don't feel able to help the mentee with their problems;

In the school case study, students felt that the mentoring programme and tutorial support, even when teachers are directly involved, may not be enough sometimes to address all the difficulties they encounter with their school subjects, especially at secondary school level, as the following focus group example shows:

D.: "Actually, in this school, there is a lot of support, but it's not enough for a person who has difficulties; as MT. said, she has problems in English, and I do too. I have a lot of [difficulties], and [I receive] English [tutorial] support from my teacher. But it's not enough, and I don't think everyone has the opportunity to go to a language school or pay for tutorial support outside of school. Even though the school tries its best to help, there are also cases where more is needed".





Benefits:

The main benefits of using this tool are:

- The role of students, who are perceived as resources in solving problems in the school community (Zimmerman et al., 2002; Dubois et al., 2002);
- The fact that modelling between students is encouraged (Tanaka & Reid, 1997);
- Fostering mutual support, a sense of responsibility between mentors and mentees, and a sense of belonging to the school community;
- Developing problem-solving skills, increased engagement with school subjects and an improvement in learning for mentees and for mentors.

“The mentoring programme, in which one student mentors another, is working very well. They can even be from the same class and the same age, or they can be from different years. I’m one of the teachers who accompanies mentoring programmes, and I have a team with a mentor from the same year, seventh grade. And I have three seventh graders who are being mentored by ninth graders. That works very well, too.

Wanting to be someone’s mentor because you feel the need to help and see the other person grow, and you grow with them, too. I think it’s essential.” (CS. teacher, ESBD)

“It’s a fantastic programme. It shows what we’re all about. It’s an excellent mentoring programme where the students themselves help each other. I’m very good at this subject, so I’ll help my classmate, the ninth grader, and I’ll help him study and motivate him.

Giving help to students who are having difficulties, but on the other hand, it also values the skills of the people who are mentoring because they’re there to help, and that’s very important, looking after our own. It’s important. People get involved. That may be why we don’t have disciplinary problems”. (PT. teacher, ESBD)



Tips for Success:

The mentoring programme can play a significant role among students:

It is preferably beneficial if there is an age gap of at least two years between mentor and mentee (Gensemer, 2000);

That the students involved in mentoring see the relationship between them as an opportunity for collaborative learning;

That students experience support and feedback from the teachers responsible for the programme or the head teacher so that they can ask questions and take stock, both on the part of the mentors and the mentees;

Objectives should be negotiated for the mentoring so that both the mentor and mentee understand what is required and explicitly agree to it;

A mentoring diary should be kept, which includes the dates of the sessions, what was covered, observations or difficulties to be reported;

The school must take responsibility for both the material and human resources (teachers and professionals) associated with the mentoring programme and for monitoring and evaluating it with the students;

The mentoring programme must be voluntary, and it should appeal to students, regularly listening to mentors and mentees, and finding ways to support and value their participation.





Additional Resources:

These links refer to work done by teachers and other professionals as part of a workshop organised by the Directorate-General for Education on the mentoring programme:

<https://dge.padlet.org/dge/jornadas-psicologia-educa-o-2020-c04gkpdix466c7js/wish/wK-mOZ5N2voLnWzMA>

<https://dge.padlet.org/dge/jornadas-psicologia-educa-o-2020-c04gkpdix466c7js/wish/lkD-VaKJjlv7yWPP9>

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<https://dge.padlet.org/dge/jornadas-psicologia-educa-o-2020-c04gkpdix466c7js/wish/mDRx-WBdDM9mwQjb1>

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- Gensemer, P. (2000). Effectiveness of cross-age and peer mentoring programs. *Information Analysis*, 30, 1-15.
- Tanaka, G. & Reid, K. (1997). Peer helpers: Encourage kids to confide. *Educational Leadership*, 55(2), 29-31.
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Conclusion:

- In the mentoring program for students, they recognise their role in helping others with their learning and they take on this responsibility so that by getting involved, they also address other issues such as sense of belonging.
- If implemented consistently, the peer mentoring programme supports and strengthens students' relational and emotional skills and closeness to school. It recognises their needs and value as children and young people, which are drivers of their educational success, and can have an impact on their school attainment and well-being.
- Building a relational community of proximity and solidarity, encouraging and supporting projects and practices such as the (peer) mentoring programme, can become essential bridges for the success of students and the school.
- For the implementation of the mentoring programme to be successful, it must have the involvement of teachers and other professionals (e.g. other educators, psychologists) so that they can follow up, monitor and support the activities and relationships between the students.





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