

Relationships Matter:

The Role of High-Quality Adult Facilitation in Predicting Positive Youth Outcomes

Introduction

Wyman’s Teen Outreach Program® (TOP®) is an evidence-based, positive youth development program for economically disadvantaged teens in grades 6–12. TOP’s theory of change emphasizes “high quality facilitation” as foundational to program delivery. Its relationship to positive program outcomes has yet to be explored.

Core Components of TOP®

WEEKLY PEER GROUP MEETINGS

“TOP Clubs” or groups meet for at least 25 weekly meetings across a program cycle, with a teen-to-facilitator ratio no greater than 25:1.

+

TOP CURRICULUM

Facilitators provide at least 12 lessons from the TOP curriculum, with content tailored to teens’ needs and interests.

+

COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING

TOP teens complete at least 20 hours of meaningful community service learning, which includes planning, action and reflection.

HIGH QUALITY FACILITATION

Caring, responsive and knowledgeable TOP staff build strong, supportive relationships with teens and create engaging and empowering TOP Club experiences.

Key Question

Do youth perceptions of experiencing a high quality facilitator predict improved social and emotional learning (SEL) and decreased academic risk behavior?

Method

SAMPLE

3,000 middle (65.7%) and high school (34.3%) youth (54.8% female) from 23 TOP sites across the United States.

Youth self-identified as African American (32.1%), White (30.6%), Hispanic/Latino (23.3%), Multi-ethnic (6.5%), Asian/Pacific Islander (2.8%), Native American/Alaskan Native (2.5%).

47.5% of youth reported their mother’s highest level of education as high school or less; 57.2% reported their father’s highest level of education as high school or less.

MATERIALS & PROCEDURE

At pre and post, youth reported academic risk behaviors: **failing grades, suspensions, skipping class.**

At pre and post, youth reported social and emotional learning on a 3-item scale that measures *problem-solving and coping* ($\alpha = .62$).

At post, youth reported on perceptions of the quality of **adult facilitation** ($\alpha = .89$), such as “TOP facilitators support and accept me.”

Discussion

Results bolster current research in Positive Youth Development suggesting high-quality facilitation—with its role in creating a safe environment, combined with strong, supportive relationships—provides the foundation for promoting positive outcomes for youth.

Results

DESCRIPTIVES

	Pre	Post
No failing grades	62.5%	68.4%
No suspensions	83.1%	88.5%
No skipped classes	86.1%	87.2%
SEL score	3.15 (<i>SD</i> = .52)	3.21 (<i>SD</i> = .52)
Facilitation score	n/a	3.51 (<i>SD</i> = .55)

FINDINGS

Data were analyzed using logistic regression for dichotomous academic variables, and linear regression for the continuous SEL variable. Control variables (race, gender, grade, baseline score) were entered in Model 1; facilitation was added in Model 2. Facilitation significantly predicted all dependent variables ($p < .001$) above and beyond control variables.

For every one point increase in the Facilitation score:

- Youth were **1.38 times more likely** to report **no failing grades**
 - $\Delta R^2 = .007$; Total $R^2 = .180$; $OR = 1.38$, [1.167,1.641]
- Youth were **1.47 times more likely** to report **no suspensions**
 - $\Delta R^2 = .007$; Total $R^2 = .167$; $OR = 1.47$, [1.157,1.867]
- Youth were **1.6 times more likely** to report **not cutting class**
 - $\Delta R^2 = .013$; Total $R^2 = .133$; $OR = 1.60$, [1.286,1.996]
- Youth’s **SEL score increased by .32 points**
 - $F(6,2306) = 100.60$, $p < .001$; $\Delta R^2 = .060$; Total $R^2 = .21$

Future studies should include direct measurement of high-quality facilitation, such as use of a facilitation observation tool, to assess facilitation as it occurs in the program setting.