



How an intervention project contributes to social inclusion of adolescents and young people of foreign origin

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the results of the impact study of the Nightingale Project, a social mentoring project, whose aim is to support the welcoming and social inclusion processes of adolescent students of foreign origin who recently arrived in Catalonia and who are currently enrolled in the country's schools. The more than one hundred mentoring pairs (mentor and mentee) that took part in the intervention project were administered a questionnaire ($N = 58$). This same questionnaire was also given to a group of adolescents with the same profile but who did not participate in the project ($N = 128$) and who were treated as a control group.

After six months of intervention (which corresponds to the duration of the Nightingale Project), results show that students who participate in mentoring learn the language faster, create broader and more diverse networks of friends in school, develop higher educational aspirations and expectations, are better acquainted with the reception context (municipality they live in), and improve standards of self-confidence and self-esteem, among other characteristics. The research also demonstrates that mentoring aimed at adolescents, as is the case of the Nightingale Project, plays a key role in avoiding development of an oppositional identity and, conversely, helps facilitate a process of resilience in adolescents in the new context of reception.

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1. Introduction

There are many areas of study on social mentoring in relation to the adolescent and young population. In this article we present the results of a study carried out with the objective of determining the impact of the Nightingale Project, especially among adolescent mentees between ages 10 and 16.

The Nightingale Project is part of the European-wide Nightingale Mentoring Network, which originated at the University of Malmö, Sweden. Since 1997 this project has been implemented in twenty European universities in central and northern Europe. The results of this study, although providing the first quantitative data collected on an international scale, also complement the partial evaluations of a qualitative nature confined primarily to Swedish territory (i.e. Sild-Lönroth, 2007 and Backe-Hansen, Seeberg, Solberg, Bakketeig, & Patras, 2011).

In this article we show, first, the main contributions of the scientific literature related to the benefits of mentoring programs on young people and then go on to highlight the contribution of the Nightingale Project. It should be noted that a large proportion of the most recognized scientific contributions on mentoring have focused on the American context, but given that American mentoring targeted at adolescents and the mentoring of the Nightingale Project have

many common objectives, we now have the opportunity to make an interesting and unprecedented comparison between different national contexts.

2. Review of the literature

In the scientific literature we find a growing volume of studies focused on analyzing mentoring relationships. Among these, some focus their interest on mentoring applied to the professional field of health and medicine, others on mentoring applied to companies, while still other studies are mainly interested in mentoring of a more social nature addressed to young people at risk of social exclusion. In recent years, studies targeting this group have convincingly demonstrated that while mentoring provides very important benefits to mentees and to society as a whole, it also benefits the public treasury, to the effect that these are policies, programs and actions with a relatively low cost when compared to traditional social intervention policies (Roberts, Liabo, Lucas, DuBois, & Sheldon, 2004).

The vast majority of studies surrounding social mentoring coincide in emphasizing that mentoring brings improvements in academic achievement as well as contributes to the balanced emotional development of mentees. Specifically, they show how mentoring impacts on the improvement of mentees' academic results, reduces absenteeism, increases educational expectations and reduces rates of disruptive and problematic behaviors such as excessive alcohol consumption, and use of violence or crime (Deutsch, Wiggins, Henneberger, & Lawrence,

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2012; Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, & McMaken, 2011; Herrera, Kauh, Cooney, Grossman, & McMaken, 2008; DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Rhodes, 2002; Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001; Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 2000; Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000). In the case of studies whose objective is social mentoring with a strong ethnic component, mentoring has been shown to be very effective in breaking down stereotypes and prejudices toward weaker and often vulnerable groups (in this regard, we recommend the research of Popova-Koskarova (2010) focused on the Roma population).

2.1. Adolescents at risk, mentoring and academic success

One of the main factors of social inclusion in today's information society is academic success. Several studies have indicated that mentoring can help foster this by two means: mentoring programs that operate within the framework of the school – in extracurricular activities, for example – or through actions that deliberately intervene outside of school. Herrera et al. (2011) emphasize that students who have trouble learning and who live in vulnerable situations can easily enter into processes of demotivation and disaffection toward school. These young people easily become accustomed to school failure, which leads to conflict behavior both in and out of school. The aforementioned authors emphasize that social mentoring programs, either within or outside the school context, if well planned and systematized, often help to reverse this situation.

Along the same lines, DuBois et al. (2002) and Larose and Tarabulsy (2005), through their research, contribute evidence that social mentoring for adolescents and young people in situations of risk, although not operating in the school framework, can help improve students' behavior, improve their relationship with school and is often a factual element in achieving better academic results. These changes usually occur because, indirectly, mentoring promotes assertive and resilient attitudes and identities in these young people.

The need to implement social mentoring projects among adolescent and young immigrants is an indisputable fact in Catalonia and in other international settings. Martín, Larena, and Mondéjar (2012) show how the school enrollment rate of immigrant students goes from 100% in compulsory education to only 19% in post-compulsory education and 3.3% in university education. The situation of school failure, coupled with low indices of post-compulsory and university education, places the foreign population in a situation of social vulnerability.

2.2. Importance of the role of the mentor and the program structure

In recent years, consensus has emerged among the scientific community that mentoring programs, per se, do not necessarily promote the social inclusion of individuals in at-risk situations. Roberts et al. (2004), for example, stress that mentoring programs, to be effective, must have quality designs and include pro-social elements for young people. Otherwise, despite the good intentions of the program, it may achieve the very opposite of what was intended.

Parra, DuBois, Neville, Pugh-Lilly, and Povinelli (2002) state that there are programs that, in reality, are not effective for young people because, in those cases, the mentors do not show the capacity to generate emotional ties with their mentees. In this regard, the authors argue that an inefficient mentor may even transmit negative influences to young people. They highlight a series of characteristics that may influence the process and must be taken into account. Characteristics such as the socio-demographic profile of the persons involved, the mentor's capacity and skills for providing support, the ability of the mentor to make the young person trust them, the possibility of maintaining regular contact between mentors and mentees, the possibility of establishing different types of meetings, and the capacity to build close relationships between mentor and mentee are considered crucially important elements.

DuBois et al. (2002), based on their study of the widely known program, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, consider as key elements for a program's success: (a) the design features and execution of the program, (b) the characteristics of the participating young people, (c) the qualities that occur between mentor and mentee and (d) the capacity to scientifically evaluate the results obtained.

3. Methodology

To verify the impact of the Nightingale Project, a primarily quantitative study was designed whose basic instrument was a questionnaire, administered at two different times, in order to establish a contrast.

The impact study focused on analyzing the contributions the Nightingale Project made, predominantly to adolescents between ten and sixteen years of age, throughout one edition: specifically the academic year 2012–2013. During this school year the same questionnaire was given twice to all the pairs participating in the Nightingale Project, once at the beginning of the project (1st round) and again toward the end (2nd round). A total of 88 questionnaires were given out, of which, counting both rounds, 56 were returned. These young people, who were labeled group of participants (treatment group), had the following characteristics: 19% were in primary school and the remaining 81% were enrolled in compulsory secondary education; 43% came from the African continent, 30.7% from Central and South America, 16.8% from Asia and the remaining 10% from Eastern Europe.

Meanwhile, the same procedure was followed with 128 boys and girls who did not participate in the Nightingale Project but who shared the same school and the same socio-economic and ethnic profile as the mentees in a single round. In this group of young people, which was used as the control group, 21% were in primary school and 79% in compulsory secondary education; 45% came from the African continent, 28% from Central and South America, 19% from Asia and the remaining 8% from Eastern Europe.

It should be noted that the survey given to both the group of participants and the control group was pre-tested through a pilot test (given to 20 students from different nationalities). This test, while it showed us that the survey was generally understood by recipients, forced us to change some questions – especially referring to questions that were interested in ascertaining self-esteem – because the approach of the question generated a certain degree of confusion.

The surveys given to students in the group of participants were administered by the respective mentors, who underwent a prior training session conducted by members of the research group. In addition, the mentors responsible for this task had technical support at their disposal at all times to clear up any questions. The surveys addressed to the control group were administered by their teachers and, as in the previous case, they also had technical support available (member of the research group). It must be noted that, regarding both the mentors and teachers charged with administering the survey, this resource was hardly used (only on three occasions), which attests to the high reliability of the instrument. There are, however, other elements that lead us to a positive judgment of the instrument: the high percentage of questions answered in a plausible way in the returned questionnaires (estimated percentage of around 90% of the questions).

For analysis of the data, we took into account the unit of measure *net effects*, more specifically the net effect of Cohen (1988), which allows us to measure the impact of mentoring by comparing the results of the treatment group and the control group. In the representation of the data we can observe two groups, referred to as *Net effects mentees*, which corresponds to the mean difference between groups, and the *Net effects of the extreme group*, which is the differential of the upper quartile group of mentees (the 25% of mentees in which the program had the greatest impact), those upon whom mentoring had the most effect.

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