CWDC
Children's Workforce
Development Council

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

An exploration into the mentor and young person as mentee relationship

PLR0910/130

MENTORING

An Exploration into the Mentor and Young Person as Mentee Relationship

Practitioner-led Research
by

Sophia Bramble

<u>Contents</u>

Mentoring: *An Exploration into the Mentor and Young Person as Mentee Relationship.*

<u>Abstract</u>

The primary topic of this practitioner-led research is mentoring. The aim is to gain an insight from the perspective of the young person, into the relationship between the mentor and the mentee as a young person. The study aims to explore the benefits of mentoring for young people and further explore what constitutes an effective mentoring relationship. Some insight into mentoring and integrated working is also intended.

Six young people participated in the research. All participants were male and were from different ethnic backgrounds. A purposive method of sampling was used to meet the needs of the study. In this instance, all participants had been involved in the *Seven Principles of RESPECTisms* group mentoring programme that was being delivered in a secondary school located in London. Participants were therefore able to offer insight into their mentoring experience. This group was identified by the school as having additional barriers that put them at risk of underachieving. The research used a triangulated approach; using questionnaires and a focus group to gain a combination of quantitative and qualitative data.

Findings indicate that the role of the mentor is perceived differently to that of other practitioners young people come into contact with. Young people believe the mentoring relationship to be a positive and valuable process, which is built- up on mutual trust and respect. Young people are in favour of the mentor working in an integrated model and sharing relevant information with other agencies to support their needs, however they are often reluctant to share their information with some practitioners due to a lack of trust. Further research is needed to correlate mentoring and integrated working to better evaluate how the mentoring role can effectively assess the needs of young people to appropriately broker support from other agencies.

Contact Details:
Miss Sophia Bramble
c-a-n-i Academy
020 8820 0809
info@c-a-n-i.com

Introduction

The primary topic of this practitioner-led research is 'mentoring'. Mentoring has become an important element of government strategy to support vulnerable young people (Philip, Schucksmith and King, 2004). The Social Exclusion Unit's (SEU) Report 'Bridging The Gap' (1999) has been particularly influential on the government's policy towards socially excluded young people, which proposed that every young person should have access to a Connexions Personal Adviser to advocate and broker support to overcome their barriers to participation and learning. The Youth Justice Board (2009) implied that the mentoring role can be a positive and trusting engagement for vulnerable young people. It can act as a protective factor to divert them away from many forms of failure and provide opportunities for success. This research therefore intends to gain further insight into 'mentoring' from a young person perspective.

Practitioner Background
I have always shown a keen interest in youth related issues. This interest soon developed into concerns when I became a mother in 2004, knowing that my son would grow up in a society that poses an increasing risk to young people (Beck, 1992).

I have a Masters in Youth Justice, and have undertaken numerous research projects on related youth issues. However, I have learnt that one of my greatest learning tools to understanding the realities and challenges young people face, has been my 15 years of work experience in the Children and Young People Services 'on the ground' through face-to-face engagement with young people and their families.

My current role as Lead Practitioner is to assess tier 2b support needs of young people and their families in line with the Every Child Matters (ECM, 2007) agenda through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), to enable the five key outcomes for young people to be met through appropriate brokering of support and integrated working.

My lead practitioner role can be perceived as an authoritative and statutory type role, which can create barriers for engagement and support. In contrast, mentoring appears to break down barriers and build trust (Philips and Hendry, 2000). The Youth Justice Board (2009) suggested that vulnerable young people deem the role of the mentor to be different to other adults in authority, ranging from; police, social workers, probation officers or even parents, with whom they can have difficult relationships.

c-a-n-i Academy
In 2006, I decided to become a volunteer mentor for c-a-n-i Academy. c-a-n-i Academy have supported my undertaking of this practitioner-led research, which will be informative at an organisational level and will also develop my individual mentoring practices.
c-a-n-i Academy provides group mentoring to young people through their accredited *Seven Principles of RESPECTisms* programme. This programme addresses the many challenges young people face in their daily lives, through the RESPECT acronym. Its components cover many of the social and emotional needs of young people in today's society through; reflective group discussion, structured activities and mentoring support.

Aim

This research aims to contribute to the understanding of mentoring. It intends to gain a qualitative insight into young people's perceptions of the mentor and mentee relationship.

As a practitioner-led research project, this investigation also aims to evaluate current mentoring practices to inform my own practices and improve future engagement and support to young people through an integrated working approach.

The investigation aims to explore:
Benefits– to what extent young people benefit from mentoring.
Relationship – what constitutes an effective mentor and mentee relationship.

Context

Harnish and Wilde (1994) suggested that there is little consensus when defining the term 'mentoring' which has poor explanation and theoretical basis. Dallos and Comley-Ross (2005) provided more recent developments in the discourse around how mentoring is defined and suggested that the definition of 'mentoring' is still a contentious issue. However, The Youth Justice Board (2009) defined mentoring in its simplistic form as; 'someone who helps others achieve their potential'.
Mentoring can be a one-to-one relationship between an adult mentor and young person, or can be in a group setting which can consist of an adult mentor to several young people (The Youth Justice Board, 2009).

Freedman (1993) implied that mentoring has been particularly influential with vulnerable young people who are at risk. This could be attributed to the primary principles of mentoring, which suggests that rapport should be built on trust, a commitment to confidentiality and equality (Philip and Hendry, 2000).

Philip and Hendry (2000) further suggested mentoring can be a 'risky business', especially when the relationship is highly confidential and where the mentor is supporting the young person on a short-term basis. Freedman (1993) similarly suggest that mentoring can have negative side effects on the young person and further implied that more study is needed in this area.

Previous Research

In 2000, '*Making Sense of Mentoring'* was the first study to compare and contrast; mentors as volunteers with mentors as professionals (Philip and Hendry, 2000).
An aspect of this study, sought to explore how mentors and young people view the mentoring process. Young people perceived the mentoring relationship as being more equal in comparison to relationship with other adults they felt more empowered to address their challenges in a non-judgemental situation, whilst mentors placed more emphasis on their ability to provide advice and guidance (Philip and Hendry, 2000).
Philip, Shucksmith and King (2004) carried out a qualitative study *'Sharing a Laugh?'* to explore the value of mentoring. Findings indicated young people value the informal nature of the mentoring relationship and predominantly found their mentoring

experience to be positive. In some instances this contributed to enhanced confidence and skills. However, findings further suggested that mentoring cannot remedy all of the challenges that vulnerable young people face (Philip, Shucksmith and King, 2004).

Ethics

This research aims to maintain the highest standard of ethical conduct. The British Sociological Society: Statement of Ethical Practice 2002 has been used as a consultative tool when compiling this research and taking into consideration ethical issues. The undertaking of this investigation is considered to be a "valuable activity" as it is intended to contribute to the "wellbeing of society". Ethical approval for the undertaking of this study, at the agency level, was authorised through the Chief Executive of c-a-n-i Academy.

Parental consent will be requested for all participants, as some young people will be under the age of consent. The young people will be also requested to consent to their individual involvement. The aim of the study will be outlined on the consent forms which will be locked away for the length of the study in accordance with data protection requirements.

The sample group will be fully informed of the research purpose and process. All participants will be advised that any information they provide will be kept confidential and if it is used in the final report, they will remain anonymous.
All participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any stage of the process.

Methodology

Sample

Purposive sampling (May, 2001) will be implemented in this research, as participants will be selected according to their known characteristics and will be representative of the same experience. In this instance, all participants will be male aged 15-16 years and will have undertaken the *Seven Principles of RESPECTisms* group mentoring programme. The young people will be accessed in a secondary school in London where they attended the group mentoring programme. The school has identified members of this group as having additional barriers to learning that put them at risk of underachieving. Identified issues are varied across the group, including; persistent exclusions, poor attendance and behavioural difficulties. This sample will be able to offer insight into their mentoring experience in line with the aims of the research.

Due to the time and report constraints of this research (as outlined by the Childrens Workforce Development Council), the intended sample size for this research is 10 participants. This is a relatively small sample group, therefore statistical claims and generalisations should not be made from the findings. However, emerging themes from the data gained can be used to inform future and more in-depth research on mentoring.

Methods

A triangulated approach to data collection will be adopted, combining questionnaires and focus group interviews. Nachmias and Nachmias (1997) stated that data gained by combining different methods can increase the validity of the findings. Biases can arise from a single method which can be partially overcome by implementing other complementary methods.

Questionnaires

The questionnaires will provide mainly qualitative data from a combination of closed and open questions.. There will however, only be a minimal source of qualitative data collected through the open questions which aim to provide further explanation to the quantitative data (see appendix 1 to view questionnaires and ascertain nature of questions).

Focus Group

The focus group discussion will enable some of the emerging themes from the questionnaires to be explored further. The questions presented will not be pre-scripted, instead the researcher will allow an open discussion and will direct questions based on emerging themes. This approach will hope to enable the collection of a rich source of qualitative data and a more relaxed environment for participants. However, the questions posed by the researcher will not encourage participants to divulge personal or sensitive information with the group but intend to gain an insight into participant's perceptions of specific services and practitioners. Thematic coding will be adopted when presenting their findings to categorise segments of the qualitative data into meaningful themes to interpret emerging features and summarise the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Findings

Six young people participated in the research. All six participants were male, two aged 15 years and four aged 16 years. Ethnicity ranged from; White British, Black Caribbean, Black African, Mixed Other and Lebanese.

Three key themes emerged from findings:
Benefits of Mentoring – comparing one-to-one and group mentoring and its impact on young people.
Mentoring Qualities – required skills of a mentor as perceived by young people.
Mentoring in Contrast to other Practitioner Relationships – identifying young people's perceptions of practitioners they come into contact with.
Benefits of Mentoring (Comparing One-to- one and Group Mentoring and Its Impact on Young People).

There was a consensus that group mentoring had been a beneficial process in different ways. It was suggested that the programme had enabled them to explore issues that affect young people in today's society whilst also enabling reflection on individual challenges.

All participants had previous mentoring experience, both on a one-to-one and group basis. The majority suggested they preferred group mentoring due to the honesty of the group and the atmosphere of the programme.

As a group, they were able to 'bounce off' each other's ideas and views. They reported that the sessions were fun, but also gained valuable information in a well structured setting.

A strong emphasis was placed on the benefits of sharing other young people's opinions and experience within the group, and that this appeared to reinforce the fact that they were not facing barriers in isolation. This is often a common challenges for many young people.

> *'It's good to be around other young people who are going through what you could be going through'.*

The fact that others were able to contribute their personal views to group discussion had, in some instances, helped others to reflect on their own thoughts and solutions.

> *'Other people in the group were able to help with my problems whilst dealing with theirs, because sometimes people can say what you are thinking when you can't quite choose the right words to say'.*

The group mentoring setting could however limit the level of openness. Therefore, it was implied that one-to-one mentoring is more appropriate for any personal discussions. This would enable young people to explore their emotions and be more explicit about their individual circumstances in a more private mentor/mentee relationship with a better sense of security created by one-to-one mentoring.

None of the sample indicated that their behaviour had worsened as a result of the programme. However, in some cases they reported mentoring had no identifiable effects and their behaviour had stayed the same. In contrast, there were some young people who reported that mentoring had positively impacted on them for example; they felt it had positively impacted on their outlook of life, as they had become more focused in the classroom, gained confidence and had a positive self-image.

> *'The mentoring programme allowed me to reflect weekly on my actions and kept me on track and focused.'*

A participant outlined a recent experience he had encountered which was personal and sensitive. It was suggested that through the relationship built with his mentor, as well as reflecting on themes discussed in the group session, this young person felt comfortable to seek one-to-one support from the mentor to resolve the issue. As a result, the mentor was able to offer advice and guidance, but also was able to advocate on the young person's behalf with other professionals.   This highlighted a two way process, where group mentoring complemented one-to-one mentoring to support a young person's needs.

Overall, there was little criticism of the programme by the young person. It was suggested that the programme should have been over a longer period of time.

> *'twelve sessions is too short '.*

It was also proposed that mentoring programmes should be implemented into the school curriculum, to address and support young people's additional barriers that sometimes have an adverse effect on their learning.

Mentoring Qualities (Required Skills of a Mentor as Perceived by Young People)
The young people emphasised the need for mutual trust and respect from a mentor. Also, that a mentor should be able to relate to young people and understand the issues they face. Mentors also need to be able to share their own life experiences to support the mentee.
'A mentor needs to have good communication skills, a good personality and knowledge about topics being discussed and not judge'.

Young people reported that the programme had been successful, mainly due to the mentor's ability and skills to engage with young people, build rapport and be empathic. In this instance the mentor built a good relationship with the group as a whole, but also offered advice and support on an individual basis. This built a trusting relationship in two forms; as a group and one-to-one.

It was suggested that mentoring can give access to a *'positive role model'*. In some cases, young people felt that the absence of their father and a lack of a positive male role model often has an adverse effect on their behaviour. The mentor therefore had been able, to some extent, bridge this gap in their life.

Mentoring in Contrast to Other Practitioner Relationships (Identifying Young People's Perceptions of Practitioners they come into Contact with).

The young people were asked to say which practitioners they felt most comfortable with and were most significant to them. This provided mixed responses from the group. Young people suggested that their teacher was seen as the most significant.
'Teachers know information about school so they know what you need help to get good grades'.

Some participants suggested that they felt most comfortable with their mentor and youth worker because of the non-judgemental nature of these roles. In comparison, social workers were reported as the more difficult professional to trust.
'Most is my mentor and youth worker because they won't judge me. Least is social workers because they don't know me well and are harder to trust'.

All participants felt comfortable with their mentor brokering support to help them overcome barriers in their life. However, young people appeared reluctant for their mentor to integrate with the police or social service agencies. It is important to note that participants were not asked to divulge individual circumstance relating to previous contact with such services, yet were asked to make judgements based on their perceptions of practitioners (see questionnaire in appendix).

Discussion

Young people perceive themselves to be living in their own social world which has different experiences and challenges to adults. It can be difficult for a young person to navigate their way through life. Therefore, mentoring can act as a support mechanism to ease a young person's transition to adulthood.

Mentoring is predominantly perceived by young people to be a positive support process. Young people appear to feel empowered by the mentor and mentee engagement, which adopts a young person centred approach. This approach enables the young person to build rapport with the mentor at their own speed and also enables their challenges to be faced at a comfortable pace.

Mentoring can be beneficial to young people in different ways, depending on the type of mentoring and the structure of sessions: Group mentoring, provides a more open setting where young people can share their opinions and experiences with other young people who face similar challenges. In contrast, one-to-one mentoring provides a more intense and trusting relationship where young people feel more comfortable to become vulnerable. However, evidence suggests that both mentoring types can be used to complement each other.

A mentor can be perceived as a positive role model for young epole for example for those who lack positive adult role models to look up to. Young people further suggest that a 'good' mentor does not necessarily have to be academic, but more importantly has life experiences to relate to the challenges young people face.

Young people perceive the role of the mentor as being different to other adult professionals, although, some similarities are made between the mentor and youth worker role. The mentoring relationship is considered to be more intense with a high level of trust from young people. In contrast, young people appear to be less trusting of the police and social worker roles.

The intensity of the mentee and mentor relationship often gives rise to mentors being privy to highly private and confidential information. Therefore, it is important that young people are made aware of the mentor's duty of care and the need to disclose information in some circumstances. However, young people are in favour of the mentor sharing information in an integrated model to support their needs. Accessing specialist services around drug-misuse and sexual health is deemed as beneficial to meet young people's needs. Yet, some young people are reluctant for the mentor to share information with the police and social service agencies due to a lack of trust.

Implications for Practice

This practitioner-led research has informed mentoring practices at both an organisational level and practitioner level.   This investigation suggests that the mentoring role requires a combination of life experience alongside the skills to engage with young people, gain rapport and effectively listen to support their needs.

I have extensive experience as a practitioner of engaging with young people on a one-to-one basis to assess and support their needs. To support my practice, I have undertaken previous training in Brief Solution Focus Therapy to help young people find their own solutions. However, I would also like training to support my engagement with young people in a group setting. This will support my method and delivery style in groups, to minimise individual's falling through the net of mentoring support.

This investigation has made me further reflect on my own life experiences and how these inform my professional practices. I believe my personal experiences and my chosen path in life should not necessarily influence the choices of my mentees. I therefore believe that it is the mentor's role to empower young people to make their own informed choices with 'some' reflection of other's experiences. I do however agree with the notion that my life experiences; from growing-up in a single-parent family to motherhood, have to some extent enabled me to better relate and empathise with young people who face similar challenges.

 At an organisational level, this investigation has highlighted the use of complementary methods of mentoring. c-a-n-i Academy therefore propose to offer all participants of *The Seven Principles of RESPECTisms* programme a designated time and opportunity to benefit from individual mentoring sessions.

Finally, this investigation has highlighted that the mentoring relationship can become very intense, with highly confidential and sensitive information being shared. Therefore, c-a-n-i Academy will implement a guide for young people to inform them of data protection and confidentiality policies when engaging in the *Seven Principle's of RESPECTisms* programme.

Conclusion

The role of the mentor is perceived differently to that of other practitioners young people come into contact with, where the mentoring relationship is deemed to be a positive and valuable process which is built- up of mutual trust and respect. Further exploration of the issues around data protection and confidentiality in the mentoring relationship is needed. Despite the informal nature of the mentoring role there is still a 'duty of care' to the young person where sensitive information may need to be shared with other parties if the young person is deemed at risk or harm.

Young people are in favour of the mentor working in an integrated model and sharing relevant information with other agencies to support their needs, they are however reluctant to share their information with some practitioners due to a negative perception and a lack of trust. Further research is needed to directly correlate mentoring and integrated working. Suggestions for further research include; a larger sample size, female opinions and a wider age range sample. This would enable a more valid sample to better understand how mentors can effectively assess young people's needs to appropriately broker support through partnership working.

References

Beck, U. (1992) **The Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity** London:Sage

Dallos, R and Comley-Ross, P. (2005) '**Young People's Experience of mentoring: Building Trust and Attachments'** *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry, Jul; vol. 10: pp. 369 - 383.*

Every Child Matters (ECM)(2007)(online) http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk
Freedman, M. (1993)**The Kindness of Strangers**: *Adult Mentors, Urban Youth and the New Voluntanism* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers

Glaser, B. and Strauss, A. (1967) **The Discovery of Grounded Theory:** *Strategies for Qualitative Research* Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company

Harnish, D. and Wild, LA (1994) **Mentoring Strategies For faculty Development**. *Studies in Higher Education* 19: 191-201

May, T. (1997). (2nd ed) **Social Research**: *Issues, methods and processes* Buckingham: Open University Press

Nachmias, C. and Nachmias, D. (1997). (5th ed) **Research Methods in the Social Sciences** London: St Martins Press

Philip, K. and Hendry, L. (2000)**Making Sense of Mentoring or Mentoring Making Sense? Reflections on the Mentoring Process by Adult Mentors with Young People.** *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* 10: 221-223

Philip, K. Schucksmith, J. And King, C. (2004) **Mentoring for Vulnerable Young People** (online) http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/mentoring-vulnerable-young-people

Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) (1999). **Bridging the Gap***: New Opportunities for 16-18 Year Olds.* London: The Stationery Office.

The British Sociological Association (2002) **Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association** (March 2002) (online) http://www.britsoc.co.uk/equality/Statement+Ethical+Practice.htm

The Youth Justice Board (2009) **Prevention** (online) http://www.yjb.gov.uk/en-gb/practitioners/Prevention/Mentoring/

<u>Questionnaire</u>

Thank you for agreeing to complete this short questionnaire on mentoring. Your contributions are valuable and could help improve future mentoring for young people. All participants will remain anonymous so answer the questions as openly and honestly as possible.

Age:
Gender:
Ethnicity:
First Language:

Section 1: <u>MENTORING EXPERIENCE</u>

- **Have you been involved in the Seven Principles of RESPECTisms group mentoring programme?**

    YES/NO
- **What did you most enjoy about the programme?**

- **What did you least enjoy about the programme?**

- **What qualities does a good mentor need to have?**

- **Have you ever had one-to-one mentoring?**

    YES/NO

- **If yes, which did you prefer (circle)**

    GROUP MENTORING   ONE-TO-ONE
- **Why did you prefer group or one-to-one mentoring, what were the differences?**

- **If you have never had one-to-one mentoring, is it something you would like?**

SECTION 2: <u>PERSONAL REFLECTION</u>

✚ **Did you put as much effort into the Seven Principles of RESPECTism programme as you could have?**

NO EFFORT   **LITTLE EFFORT**   **SOME EFFORT**

       LOT OF EFFORT   **MAXIMUM EFFORT**

✚ **Since attending the programme which aspects of your life have improved, stayed the same or got worse?**

	Improved	Same	Worse
School Attendance			
Punctuality			
Behaviour			
Focus in class			
Self image			
Responsible actions			
Positive friends			
Think about consequences			

✚ **Please circle any of the following people you have had support or direct contact with:**

Youth Worker   **Youth Offending Team**   **Careers Adviser**

 Doctor   **Social Worker**   **Mentor**

Teacher   **Drug Worker**   **Police**

✚ **Out of the people you have listed above, who did you feel most and least comfortable to go to for support and why?**

Section 3: <u>Additional Support</u>

✚ **Would you say mentoring has made you feel more or less positive about yourself and your future goals and aspirations?**

➕ **Please indicate which of the following areas you might feel comfortable to discuss with a mentor for support:**

	YES	MAYBE	NO
Careers Advice			
Family issues			
Sexual health (contraception)			
Social Services			
Police Incident			
Negative Peers			
Drug Misuse			

Your opinions are valuable, are there any other comments you would like to add?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Appendix 2

9th January 2010
Dear Parent/ Guardian

Mentoring Evaluation

A group of pupils have been involved in the Seven Principle's of Respectisms mentoring programme at **(DELETED SCHOOL NAME)** . The programme is now coming to an end and as part of the evaluation process we would like to get feedback on young people's experience of the programme and their views on mentoring.

We request that pupils complete a short questionnaire and participate in a focus group discussion relating to mentoring. All participants' contributions will remain anonymous and the information provided will remain confidential. Some information gained will be fed back to the Children Workforce Development Council to help improve future mentoring practice and to support young people's needs.

The evaluation will take place on Wednesday 3rd February.   A token gift voucher will be given to all participants for their contribution. In order for pupils to participate the attached consent slip must be completed by a parent or guardian and returned by Friday 29thJanuary.

....

Consent Slip
I do/ do not consent to (name) .... participation in the mentoring evaluation on Wednesday 3rd February.

Signed...(parent/guardian)

The Children's Workforce Development Council leads change so that the thousands of people and volunteers working with children and young people across England are able to do the best job they possibly can.

We want England's children and young people's workforce to be respected by peers and valued for the positive difference it makes to children, young people and their families.

We advise and work in partnership with lots of different organisations and people who want the lives of all children and young people to be healthy, happy and fulfilling.

www.cwdcouncil.org.uk

For more information please call **0113 244 6311**
or visit **www.cwdcouncil.org.uk**

Or write to CWDC, 2nd Floor, City Exchange
11 Albion Street, Leeds LS1 5ES
email info@cwdcouncil.org.uk
or fax us on 0113 390 7744

Contact us to receive this information in a different language
or format, such as large print or audio tape.