'A small scale survey assessing the impact of mentoring perspectives on mentoring schemes within primary and secondary schools.'

Laura Brennan, Liverpool Hope University

Abstract

The concept of mentoring is not a new phenomenon; it can be traced back to Greek mythology. Nevertheless, it is an increasingly popular area of interest within the development of children and young people. The research undertaken demonstrates the different perspectives held on mentoring particularly in relation to what mentoring is, the impact perspectives may have on mentoring schemes, and whether perspectives have changed or are changing. Four participants with a variety of experience working with children and young people were interviewed to gather an in-depth understanding of their views on mentoring. Analysis of interviews and literature highlighted how mentoring can be regarded as a formal and confusing term among people who do not associate their role with that of mentoring. Additionally, the role of early intervention and age appropriateness was a key theme: mentoring, it is suggested, should be made available as early as possible in a child's life. Overall, mentoring plays a significant role in children and young people's personal and academic development and, therefore, clarification of mentoring is urgently needed.

Introduction

What is mentoring?

The term 'mentor' derives from Greek mythology. The King of Ithaca- Odysseus- while away fighting in the Trojan War entrusted his son to his wise and faithful associate, 'Mentor'. Mentor's duty was to provide support and guidance for Odysseus' son. These duties are often associated with mentoring and the role of mentors today (Ragins and Kram, 2007). Furthermore, the Latin roots of the word 'mentor' refer to 'thinker'; thus the role of a mentor can also be viewed as concerned with enabling people to become self-thinkers (Pask and Joy, 2007).

Due to the different origins and associations of 'mentor', defining the term has become problematic: there is no collective definition on what it is. According to Hall (2003) mentoring can mean different things to different people: it is an ill-defined concept. Nevertheless, many people have provided characteristics related to the process of mentoring. Gulam and Zulfiqar (1998) provide a general definition of mentoring, suggesting it is a relationship between someone more experienced guiding and supporting a less experienced individual in a none judgemental manner (cited in Hall, 2003).

Being a difficult concept to define can affect people's understanding of what mentoring is and what is involved within it. As well as the various definitions having an impact upon perspectives, the many forms which mentoring comes under further add to people's confusion and lack of understanding. Mentoring comes in a variety of

forms including formal, planned, structured, informal, traditional one-one, group mentoring, peer mentoring, E-mentoring and many others (Center for Mentors, 2011). Thompson and Kelly-Vance (2001) propose that 'planned' or 'artificial' mentoring is greatly needed in today's society because of the lack of the knid of 'natural' mentoring that used to occur through the family, the community and the church (Brennan, 2014).

Why is mentoring so important?

Mentoring has become increasingly prevalent in the development of children and young people, particularly in today's rapidly evolving and unstable society (EDUCAUSE, 2014). The role of mentors is becoming a more valued and desired way of assisting children and young people to overcome societal and personal pressures through providing support and guidance (Russell, 2007).The importance of mentoring has been reflected in the research undertaken over recent years to address the lack of knowledge surrounding mentoring and its attributes. Much of the research focuses on mentoring relationships in terms of personal development, well-being and academic attainment. Clutterbuck (2004) argues that not everyone needs a mentor per se but that everyone could benefit from having one: mentoring can be of benefit to people of all ages and experiences.

The significance of mentoring is demonstrated by the Department for Education and Skills (2005) which suggests that mentors are helping children to achieve the five key outcomes proposed by the 'Every Child Matters' report- 'being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution to the community and economic well-being (cited in Rose and Doveston, 2008: 145-155).

Prior research into mentoring also portrays how encouragement and support from someone considered as an outside source, i.e. not a parent, teacher or a person in a position of authority, can be vital in the prevention of children and young people becoming disengaged from and unmotivated by school and society at large (Brennan, 2014). Such 'outsider' influence can as a result enable mentees to achieve their assigned goals (Brennan, 2014).

In addition, the value placed on mentoring has increased over the years in correspondence to the influx of societal pressures faced by children and young people in many areas of their life. The development of mentoring schemes in schools is also on the rise to meet the stresses that occur during school years (Brennan, 2014). Furthermore, the pressure placed on schools to perform well in terms of league tables and school inspections means that such stresses are then transferred onto the teachers and thence to the students (Russell, 2007). Pressures from family, peers, media, and society can create a difficult environment for children and young people to grow up and develop within. Mentoring is needed to help support and guide those going through such challenging aspects of their development (Brennan, 2014).

The factors affecting mentoring schemes

Although research reveals how mentoring schemes can be beneficial for the well-being of children and young people, there are multiple factors impacting on the

success and implementation of mentoring schemes (Clutterbuck, 2004; Rose and Doveston, 2008; EDUCAUSE, 2014). While the perspectives held by mentors are often positive and encouraging, the views of those being mentored are not always so optimistic. Those who receive planned mentoring at school often think they are given this service because they are disobedient and disruptive in class, and that mentoring is intended to address these concerns as well as improve their academic attainment (Russell, 2007). This view of mentees as 'problem pupils' is an area explored within Russell's research on mentees and their own experiences regarding their involvement within mentoring schemes. Russell (2007) highlighted how mentees' concerns of being viewed negatively and treated differently by teachers was a key aversion for students' participation.

Similarly Evans (2013) portrays how such negative perceptions of mentees have a significant impact on whether students put themselves forward for mentoring schemes: whether they attend the sessions; whether schools implement mentoring schemes, and whether parents feel they want their child to be mentored.

Students perceived as academically capable or 'good' in class can often be put forward for mentoring according to Russell (2007) although this factor can often be overlooked by both teachers and parents. Mentoring does not only seek to address academic attainment but also a variety of factors that may be affecting a student: it is by no means 'problem pupils' who primarily receive mentoring. Evans (2013) acknowledges this view by recognising that students often participate in mentoring schemes in order to tackle emotional issues and personal problems that they are encountering at home or in school (Brennan, 2014).

Another factor impacting on the effectiveness of mentoring schemes, other than people's perceptions, is the organisation involved. Miller (2004) suggests that a key issue affecting mentoring schemes in UK schools is that they are poorly put together and organised. Miller (2004) proposes that the reason for this is that schools in the UK are simply just copying what schools in other countries are doing and expecting the same success without implementing the same amount of preparation and introduction time. In order for mentoring schemes in the UK to be more effective a deeper understanding of what mentoring is and what is involved, is required, as well as the incorporation of such schemes wholly into schooling. Moreover, teachers' reluctance for students to be absent from classroom time in order to attend such vital mentoring sessions has to be addressed(Russell, 2007; Brennan, 2014). Research undertaken in the U.S where mentoring is predominately implemented within schools, identifies how parental and guardian involvement can impact immensely on the success of mentoring schemes as well as what mentees obtain from being involved (U.S Department of Education, 2005). The U.S research portrays how the involvement of parents and guardians in mentoring schemes is a fundamental element in ensuring the program's success. Programs with the addition of parental involvement have improved outcomes; they increase mentees' engagement, and they make an overall positive change to those mentored (Brennan, 2014).

The researcher hoped to address the three key aims of the paper.
Firstly, to identify the different perspectives held on mentoring such as what mentoring is, and who needs it.

Secondly, the impact different perspectives can have on those involved within mentoring schemes as well as on the outcome of schemes in general.

Lastly, to establish whether opinions held on mentoring have changed over time, or are currently changing.

The Research

The methodology involved

The research took place using one-to-one semi structured interviews to gather an insight into perspectives held, in order to establish whether the interview findings corresponded or contracted with those in the literature review. The questions used were semi-structured, providing a guideline whilst enabling the researcher to probe for deeper opinions from the participants. Additionally, semi-structured interviews allowed for researcher and participant the freedom to discuss a topic further or to query something without being constricted and confined to a rigid interview specification (Kajornboon, 2005). According to Mason (2004) semi-structured interviews create a comfortable and informal atmosphere. As such the participants interviewed appeared at ease, knowing that there were no right or wrong answers: the interviews were based solely on their own perspectives and experiences.

According to the Association for Qualitative Research (AQR) there are numerous advantages to using qualitative methodology within research, particularly in providing research with an "unparalleled understanding of the motivation behind human behaviour, desires and needs" (AQR, 2013: 1). This is of particular importance when discussing the concept of mentoring, as mentoring styles ought to be tailored to accommodate an individual's specific requirements.

Interviewing four participants created sufficient time for the interviews to be transcribed after they had taken place. Interviews were kept to around 15 minutes in order for transcribing to be of manageable proportions. Although it would have been of interest to interview more participants it was important to gain interviews of quality and depth rather than short, uninformative pieces of dialogue.

The role of the participants interviewed

The four participants interviewed were of a range of ages and experiences working with children and young people in a variety of contexts. Participants A and B were teachers from a Junior School in the Shropshire area who provided interesting perspectives and highlighted factors not considered by the researcher prior to the interviews. The other two participants, C and D, were youth workers from Liverpool who both had a vast amount of experience working with children from 8 years old to 16 years. As a result they were able to provide insights into the value and need of mentoring throughout the significant developmental years in a young person's life.

Data Analysis

In order to analysis the data, interviews were tape recorded allowing for transcribing to be undertaken afterwards to critically analyse the information collected. Due to qualitative date being unstructured, non-numerical and non-linear, coding plays a vital part in organising findings and making sense of textual data (Hartas, 2010). Coding is primarily undertaken by the researcher as it involves determining categories and allocating meaning in order that comparisons might be made (Saldana, 2013). Codes are usually assigned to certain words, phrases, chunks of varying sentence lengths or even whole paragraphs. Saldana (2013) portrays how coding can be a time consuming, manual labour task, a feature which also has to be taken into account when using such analysis.

Themes Identified

The interviews highlighted four interesting areas concerning mentoring:
1.   *Age appropriateness and the importance of early intervention*
2.   *The role of trust and respect within mentoring*
3.   *Individuals' different requirements and needs*
4.   *The term mentoring as confusing and too formal*

These themes were all present in each of the interviews thus indicating their importance. Gordan (1992) puts forward the importance of providing clear definitions of assigned codes. Therefore code 1, '*Age appropriateness and the importance of early intervention*' refers to the participants' views regarding the age of mentees considered most appropriate as well as participants' opinions on the significance early intervention can have on those being mentored and the success of mentoring schemes (Brennan, 2014).

Secondly, code 2. '*The role of trust and respect within mentoring*' was a significant theme raised within all of the interviews; participants expressed the concept of mentees feeling at ease with those considered approachable and non-judgemental. Mentees feel more comfortable divulging information to people in a less authoritative position (Brennan, 2014).

Thirdly, code 3. '*Individuals' different requirements and needs*' is an important feature involved in mentoring due to each mentee having different goals and objectives to address. Thus each mentoring session should be tailored to specific people rather than treating everyone and all issues in the same manner (Brennan, 2014).

Finally, code 4. '*The term mentoring as confusing and too formal*' was mentioned in the interviews as an area that should be addressed in order for people to gain an understanding of what mentoring is and what it involves. As suggested by Hall (2003) mentoring in general is a complex term to define due to its having different meanings and connotations for different people (Brennan, 2014).

The Results

1. Age appropriateness and the importance of early intervention

This concept did not originally arise whilst reviewing research already undertaken into mentoring; nevertheless it was a key area of discussion during the interview process. Participant A, a Junior School teacher, described how the role of early intervention would have been beneficial in a number of cases she has experienced over the years "...*we have children...who I feel should have had some sort of mentoring before they came here and had real behavioural issues…*" Participant A also expressed, however, that it is only "...*some of the children that come up here in year three that I feel would have benefited from mentoring beforehand.*" However, participant A demonstrates how early intervention can be beneficial for some children*,* and should be considered during primary school, thus addressing any concerns or issues before they became larger and more challenging. This view was reiterated by Participant A *"...if those issues had been addressed then we wouldn't be having these issues now or in secondary school"* (Brennan, 2014).

Additionally, participant B commented on the concept of age and early intervention in relation to mentoring, stating how mentoring should not be age specific, rather people should be *"...encouraged from it doesn't matter what age..."* Participant B put forward an interesting point, demonstrating how mentoring as well as not being age specific should also not be simply confined to school institutes "…*it doesn't necessarily have to start when they are at school I think if a child needs that support, encouragement and a confidence boost and someone there to trust then it should be there from any age"* (Brennan, 2014). As suggested by Russell (2007) mentoring does not just aim to address academic attainment but a variety of concerns and issues. Although schools are primarily where schemes are implemented, mentoring schemes are also available in various contexts such as youth clubs, sporting societies, after school clubs etc. (Brennan, 2014).

  Additionally, Participant C spoke of the experience of working with children and young people describing what he had noticed throughout his years of youth work "...*I'd certainly say in our experience 8 years [old] and up has worked*..." Participant C explained how the importance of working with and developing a young person over many years is vital in ensuring that mentoring is successful *"...from 8 years old right the way up to 15, 16, 17*" results in having an understanding of the young person and being able to address him or her appropriately (Brennan, 2014).

  Furthermore, Participant D expressed his view on the importance of early intervention: "*I am a great believer in the early intervention*". However he also put forward how instead of mentoring being age appropriate it is more important for a child or young person to have an understanding of the nature of mentoring in order for the scheme to be beneficial for: "[when you are] *really young you haven't got them skills to...think within the principle of mentoring"* due to mentoring being *"...about a learning process". H*e demonstrated the need for an understanding of the skill level involved in mentoring rather than the mentee's age (Brennan, 2014).

2. The role of trust and respect within mentoring

The second key theme established through the interviews was 'The role of trust and respect within mentoring'. Unlike the previous finding, the role of trust and respect

has been a prominent feature in research already undertaken into mentoring. Therefore, it was expected to be highlighted when discussing factors which impact on mentoring. The literature review expressed how trust and respect allows for mentees to feel comfortable and able to open up freely with their mentor (Rose and Jones, 2007). Participant D expressed this concept of mentors considered to be on a mentee's 'level' by stating that mentors "... *communicate more on their form than what a teacher does, more on their level and stuff".* Participant A also mentioned how the relationship between mentors and mentees is different to that of other relationships "…*they do see us on a slightly different level and they do I think they feel they can come and talk to us."* This view of mentors as approachable may suggest why mentors are often trusted greatly by their mentees (Brennan, 2014).

Participant B also raised the importance of trust within mentoring, suggesting that mentoring "*...gives children the confidence and the trust in somebody that they need."* This point was further reiterated by Participant A stating how by being trusted by those they work with allows for the young people to confide in them "…*because of who we are and the way that we operate young people feel a lot more comfortable talking to us about things and we can mentor them with issues they have…"* (Brennan, 2014).

3. Individuals' different requirements and needs

As well as the significance of trust and respect within a mentoring relationship, the need to tailor mentoring to each individual in order to address their requirements is a critical component that can affect the success of mentoring schemes. Mentoring involves treating people in a non-judgemental manner (Gulam and Zulfiqar, 1998 cited in Hall, 2003). It also requires mentors to recognise that each mentee is different. Therefore mentors should not use the same programmed style and format with every mentee. Mentoring is used to address a variety of personal as well as academic concerns and individuals have different requirements and needs to work through (Brennan, 2014).

Participant A demonstrated how dealing with mentees in an individual manner allows for mentors to start *"…really honing in and tapping into their full potential and making sure they are using their skills to the best possible effect."* Participant A also acknowledges how within the junior school mentors treat mentees "....*differently depending on their different situations and what their problems are…"* As such the school tailors mentoring styles to meet most effectively the requirements and needs of the mentees (Brennan, 2014).

This concept of mentoring not being a one style fits all approach was expressed by Participant D in a clear and concise way "...*you can't have a blanket approach to mentoring, it's very much a subjective individualistic thing whereby you have to tailor your approach to mentoring..."*

As well as tailoring mentoring style to each individual, the participants interviewed put forward the key component taken into consideration- the mentees' different home lives. Participant B raised this point *"…a lot of the children in the school that I work at, they have the mentoring because of the background at home…".* Home life can understandably have an impact on their behaviour and attitude whilst at school.

Participant B elaborated on this point stating that some mentees have *"…a bad background at home so when they do come into school and they're acting a different way…"* Similarly, Participant C acknowledged that mentees often discuss with mentors topics and concerns that they feel unable to share with those at home *"…young people have talked to us about things that they couldn't talk to parents about".* Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that it is not always the mentees home-life which can influence the need or desire for mentoring. It can often be due to the relationship of trust mentioned in the previous findings as to why mentees confide in mentors rather than people at home (Brennan, 2014).

4. The term mentoring as formal and confusing

Mentoring as previously discussed has been a difficult concept to define, and it continues to be a confusing term to understand due to its having a different meaning for different people (Hall, 2003). To assign a single definition to mentoring, therefore, is problematic. This need for mentoring to be understood clearly and concisely was raised by all the participants interviewed. Participant A says "...*it's how you define the term mentoring…'I've never really put [what I do] into a category of mentoring..."* suggesting how understanding mentoring is dependent on whether or not some mentors are aware of the vital role they are involved in when assisting children and young people's development.

Additionally, Participant C suggests that people may not always make the connection between what they do with mentoring. Therefore, a clearer understanding is needed "...*a greater understanding of what's been done would be helpful".* Furthermore, Participant D reveals the confusion associated with mentoring when he admits that he himself is unaware of the mentoring role he has "...*it comes under my job description to do mentoring but I'm not a mentor- it just comes under the job description".* The impact of a lack of understanding surrounding mentoring is acknowledged by Participant B "*Mentoring is sometimes looked on as negative by the parents if they are unaware or unsure on what it is and can actually do for their child."* Thus it becomes clear that the importance of mentoring needs emphasising; mentors need to recognise the role they play, and they need to understand the impact on those involved and on the schemes outcome of not making clear the nature of the mentoring role.

Conclusion

The main findings of this research indicate how different perspectives on mentoring can impact on whether mentoring occurs at all, as well as whether it is successful. The research also revealed the need for mentoring to be more clearly defined in order for a general and concise understanding to be gained. Mentors also need to acknowledge the important role they have in assisting with the development and well-being of their mentees.

The findings from the interviews undertaken highlighted areas not previously considered by the researcher, such as age appropriateness and early intervention. These two features of mentoring often overlapped during the interviews, thus indicating how an adequate understanding of the nature of mentoring is important for mentoring to be of most value. Practitioners and mentors could attempt to address

the issue of misunderstanding and misinterpretation of mentoring through informative leaflets and meetings with parents or guardians. They might also hold classroom discussions on the topic. Nevertheless, the role of early intervention was acknowledged as a significant factor by all participants in the overall success and benefit for mentees and mentoring schemes.

Although it would have been interesting to gain perspectives from a larger sample group, the participants interviewed provided valuable insights into the different attitudes and opinions held on mentoring, as well as the impact these views can have on mentoring schemes. The copious years of experience working with children and young people in a variety of contexts meant that the participants involved were knowledgeable in the whole process of mentoring.

Acknowledgements

References

AQR. (2013) 'The Association for Qualitative Research' [Online] Available from: http://www.aqr.org.uk/

Brennan, L. (2014) 'A small scale survey assessing the impact of mentoring perspectives on mentoring schemes within primary and secondary schools.' (Unpublished)

Center for Mentors. (2011) 'Types of Mentoring: The Five Types of Mentoring' [Online] Available from: http://centersformentors.org/typesofmentoring.asp

Clutterbuck, D. (2004) 'Everyone Needs a Mentor: Fostering talent in your organisation' Charted Institution of Personnel and Development: London

EDUCAUSE. (2014) 'About Mentoring, Mentoring in the 21st Century' EDUCAUSE [Online] Available from: http://www.educause.edu/careers/special-topic-programs/mentoring/about-mentoring

Evans, F. (2013) 'No bad children: only bad circumstances.' Common Ground [Online] Available from http://www.starmentoring.com/star-news/74-common-ground.html

Gorden, R. (1992). 'Coding Interview Responses' Basic Interviewing Skills. Itasca, IL: F. E. Peacock [Online] Available from: http://www.indiana.edu/~educy520/sec5982/week_5/qual_data_analy_ex2.pdf

Hartas, D. (2010) 'Educational Research and Inquiry: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches'. Continuum International Publishing Group: London http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/schoolsweb/studentsupport/studentwellbeing/mentoringguidelines.pdf

Kajornboon, A. (2005) 'Using interviews as research instruments' Language Institute [Online] Available from: Chulalongkorn University

Mason, J. (2004) 'The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Social Science Research Methods' Semi-structured Interviews [Online] Available from: http://srmo.sagepub.com/view/the-sage-encyclopedia-of-social-science-research-methods/n909.xml

Pask, R., Joy, B. (2007) 'Mentoring- Coaching, a guide for education professionals' Open Press university: Berkshire.

Ragins, B., Kram, K. (2007) 'The Roots and Meaning of Mentoring' SAGE Publications [Online] Available from http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/17419_Chapter_1.pdf

Rose, R., Doveston, M. (2008) Pupils talking about their learning mentors: what can we learn? Educational Studies [Online] vol.34 (2) p145-155. Available from: Taylor & Francis

Rose, R., Jones, K. (2007) 'The efficacy of a volunteer mentoring scheme in supporting young people at risk' Journal of Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties [Online] vol.12 (1) pp.3–14.

Russell, L. (2007) 'Mentoring is not for you: mentee voices on managing their mentoring experience' Improving Schools [Online] vol.10 (1) pp. 41-52. Available from: SAGE Publications

Saldana, J. (2013) 'An Introduction to Codes and Coding.' *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. 2nd Edition. Sage Publications: London

Thompson, L., Kelly-Vance, L. (2001) 'The Impact of Mentoring on Academic Achievement of At-risk Youth' Children and Youth Services Review [Online] vol.23 (3) pp.227-242.

U.S Department of Education. (2005) Mentoring Resource Center: The Mentoring Fact Sheet [Online] Available from: www.edmentoring.org