Mentoring relationships: an explanatory review

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Abstract

Mentoring is one of those bright ideas that take a periodic grip on the imagination of the policy community. Everyone appreciates that one learns from experience\(^1\) and so much the better if one can trade on the wisdom of others. Here, then, is the kernel of the ‘mentoring movement’. Creating a close relationship with a knowledgeable guide is seen as an all-purpose resource offering both opportunities for advancement and solutions to disadvantage. These are the small beginnings of a brainchild that has sprung though social and public policy, with mentoring programmes being initiated from the prison wing to the boardroom, and from the maternity ward to the hospice.

This paper pulls together some of the evidence on these interventions. The review, however, is not in the verdict business. Like any big idea, mentoring will have its time and its place. Decision makers need to understand that the evidence does not yield a thumbs up or a thumbs down for mentoring, but only circumstantial and conditional truths. Accordingly, the focus here is on the mentoring relationship. What makes for an effective partnership between mentor and mentee? How does the relationship develop? Who is in the best position to offer support? Who is likely to benefit? These are explanatory tasks and the purpose of this synthesis is to answer them by forwarding a theory of mentoring relationships. The objective is to produce a model that will be helpful in implementing and targeting such programmes and, above all, in creating realistic expectations about what can be achieved.

The review draws most of its evidence from empirical research on youth mentoring – the pairing of disadvantaged and, often, disaffected youth with an experienced adult. This is perhaps mentoring’s most challenging task and it throws into relief the kinds of social forces that a relationship has to withstand if it is to succeed. But since mentoring relationships are found in every walk of life, the review also looks at some very different schemes, the better to understand the dynamics of the partnerships. Accordingly, youth-on-youth peer support, workplace mentoring, and self-help interventions to support the ill are also examined, if in rather less detail.

In all of these situations the development of a bond between mentor and mentee can create the underlying momentum for change. Gains are almost always recorded in the affective sphere; strong emotional ties are often created. Sharing the experience of someone who has gone through the same agonies and triumphs is shown to be a point of resilience upon which to build. However, the evidence also shows that partnerships cannot be forced and that they sometimes take the line of least resistance. The most disaffected on the streets and the most recalcitrant in the office often go unmentored. Mentoring does not always get to where it is most needed. What is more, mentors often have the wisdom but not the resources to spur major and long-term changes. Close relationships, even ones voluntarily and graciously proffered, cannot sweep away the institutional and structural forces that hold sway over people’s lives.

\(^1\) This is so even if those experiences were misguided. Consider, in this respect, Oscar Wilde’s famous definition: ‘Experience is the name that people give to their mistakes.’
Acknowledgements

Realist synthesis is so new it trades on one of the less celebrated forms of mentoring: the blind leading the blind. Nevertheless, thanks go to the usual suspects at the ESRC UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice. Lesley Grayson tamed the top and the tail. Annette Boaz nursed along a sister project trying to get some use made of this review, on which there will be a separate Working Paper. Fay Sullivan squelched though the conceptual swamp at the beginning, and helped to shape the model.

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Mentoring relationships: an explanatory review

This paper is a demonstration project, presenting a worked example of a new form of systematic review. It takes as its topic the broad arena of mentoring initiatives and the idea that a mentor’s care and personalised attention provides a ‘window of hope’ (Freedman, 1993) in the face of a whole range of personal travails and social problems. The purpose of the synthesis is to develop a general model that will describe different forms of mentor/mentee relationship and eventually begin to explain what makes for a successful relationship. The review follows the strategy of ‘realist synthesis’, the methodological details of which are found elsewhere\(^2\). In observance of that research strategy, this paper follows the formula:

I)  **Concept Mining**: extraction of a theory of mentoring relationships from the existing literature.

II) **Theory Formalisation**: codification of the theory into a set of explanatory propositions (or model).

III) **Evidence Synthesis**: revision and development of that model to explain the complex pattern of success and failure found in the empirical evidence on mentoring partnerships.

**Part I. Three Core Concepts**

Those engaged in ‘reviewing the literature’ are all too familiar with a methodological headache going by the name of ‘the never-ending list’. Two such infinite inventories dawn quickly – horribly quickly – on the would-be synthesiser of the evidence on mentoring relationships.

**In what ways might the mentor and mentee be similar, and how might they differ?**

The substance of the potential ‘match’ between mentor and mentee has been monitored and researched in terms of the following variables: age, sex, race, religion, locality, ethnicity, class, wealth, family, dependants, sexuality, disability, health, aptitude, intelligence, experience, occupation, education, qualifications, institution, seniority, criminality, contacts, networks, affiliations, aspirations, temperament, values, morals, attitudes, identity, personality, culture, interests, and so on and so forth.

And what of the relationship that occurs between these partners?

**In what way might mentor and mentee interactions be similar, and how might they differ?**

Researchers have described the activities going on under the name of mentoring as follows: helping, coaching, tutoring, counselling, sponsoring, role modelling, befriending, bonding, trusting, mutual learning, direction setting, progress chasing, sharing experience, providing respite, sharing a laugh, widening horizons, building resilience, showing ropes, informal apprenticeships, providing openings, kindness of strangers, sitting by Nellie, treats for bad boys and girls, the Caligula phenomenon, power play, tours of middle class life, etc. etc.

\(^2\) A full account of realist synthesis is to be found in Pawson et al (2004). There will be some brief additional methodological annotation in this paper but it will all be relegated to footnotes.
What are the consequences of these myriad distinctions? Clearly, in envisioning such
differences and coining this plethora of terms to capture a particular facet of
mentoring, authors have felt that they have uncovered something significant about
how mentoring works. Clearly, there are an infinite number of ways in which such a
relatively unplanned and long-term relationship may operate and develop. And
equally clearly, the precise way in which the mentoring partnership is configured, in
respect of the above features and more, will make a potential difference to its
outcomes.

However, there is no utility in research or policy terms in the message that success in
mentoring lies in the balance of a thousand little imponderables. So are there some
shared themes, some core properties, some common denominators that underlie a
successful relationship? The first part of the review thus consists of an exercise in
‘conceptual mining’, digging through the literature for key terms, abstract ideas,
middle-range theories and hypotheses that might provide explanatory purchase on the
multifarious differences identified in the preceding paragraphs. I leap here to the
results of that exercise3. The initial framework of the model is made up of three core
concepts that are used over and again in the literature as ways of describing
differences in the mentor/mentee relationship and as explanations of why some
partnerships seem to flourish better than others.

The three core concepts, described in very broad terms, are:

i) **Status differences** (the respective social standing of the partners)

ii) **Reference group position** (the social identity of mentor and protégé)

iii) **Mentoring mechanism** (the interpersonal strategy that affects change)

**i) Mentor and mentee status**

It almost goes without saying that an understanding of status distinctions is key to
understanding the efficacy of mentoring programmes. A common raison d’être of
mentoring interventions is to overcome status barriers, using the mentor as a human
bridge. Thanks to what has been called the ‘manic optimism’ of its protagonists,
mentoring schemes have been put in place in every walk of life and put forward,
moreover, as a solution to all manner of individual woes and social problems.
Accordingly, there are attempts to mentor women managers through the glass ceiling
to boardroom positions; there are prison buddy systems in which experienced inmates
try to safeguard wing novitiates; there are parenting schemes in which mothers-that-
are show the ropes to mothers-to-be; there are support schemes in which dying
patients offer fellowship to the terminally ill; and so on and so on. Mentoring schemes
thus find themselves embedded across a whole range of subtle status distinctions, and
clearly some of these are more likely to be bridged than are others. In order to get
some purchase on what makes for a fruitful relationship, the review requires, as a first
port of call, a very simple classification that can be applied to describe status
similarities/difference between any pair of mentors and protégés4. The following

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3 A very long story is thus omitted. There is nothing in this paper about the search and retrieval of
documents. Nor is there anything on the judgement involved in selecting the most promising
conceptual system, a process described in Pawson et al (2004) as a journey through a ‘conceptual
swamp’.

4 For the sake of variety, I use the terms ‘mentee’ and ‘protégé’ interchangeably through the
preliminary discussion. A further footnote is added (28) when the distinction begins to bite.
 ultra-simple, three-fold classification (Figure 1) of status group positions will serve as an elemental grid:

**Figure 1: Status group classification**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Insider</th>
<th>Marginal</th>
<th>Outsider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The literature on social status recognises two types of distinctions: those situations in which social standing is ‘hierarchical’ and those in which it is ‘oppositional’ (Parkin, 1971). The former applies, for example, to a firm’s occupational ladder, whilst the latter would denote the difference between those with and without a criminal record. The insider/marginal/outsider distinction portrayed above deliberately forces these two forms together so that it can freely draw mentor/mentee status comparisons from walk of life to walk of life, and from policy domain to policy domain. The point of using such a simple system is that the loss in fidelity (in missing the nuanced distinctions) is balanced by a gain in scope (in seeking universal applicability).

The respective status identifiers can thus be used to describe mentor and mentee status in respect of any dimension in the first ‘infinitely long list’. And to recognise another age-old distinction made in the literature (Bendix and Lipset, 1960), the status grid will also bestride an ‘inherited’ status difference (e.g. sex, colour) or an ‘achieved’ one (e.g. addiction, offender) or those that may be a bit of both (e.g. illness, education). The basic idea is to produce a simple but universal yardstick that will allow us to portray i) the respective status positions of mentors and mentees, and; ii) the shift in protégé status as envisaged by the mentoring initiative. In the main body of the paper, the analysis will examine dozens of different mentoring relationships and targets. In some cases the match will be between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’: some partnerships will be formed of ‘insiders’ and ‘marginals’; some will try to link ‘outsiders’ with fellow ‘outsiders’. In some cases the intervention will seek an elevation in protégé rank, and in others it will be satisfied if the outcome is contentment with existing status.

In utilising the three-fold distinction it is, of course, recognised that some permutations are more likely and that some categories are more densely populated than others. Sometimes, the range will more naturally tend to span ‘insider to marginal’ as within, say, a hospital where one might have managers and staff or, more likely, many different grades and levels of seniority. Sometimes, the span will be from ‘insider to outsider’ as when the mentor holds some professional position and the mentee is an addict, asylum seeker, AIDS/HIV sufferer etc. Another complication, well rehearsed in the literature, is that an individual’s status is likely to be ‘multiple’ (Lenski, 1954; Van Sell et al, 1981). Most obvious, perhaps, is the case of mentoring programmes for disadvantaged youth, when the protégés may well be poor, of colour, parentless, illiterate, victimised and so on. Once again, I will rely on adjustments and approximations to the basic grid when it comes to analysing such cases.

One justification for highlighting this simple status conceptualisation is that it subsumes distinctions already made in the literature such as that between ‘lateral’ and ‘hierarchical’ relationships (Eby, 1997). To spell out the obvious, the former occurs when mentor and mentee occupy the same status, the latter occurs when there is a status difference which usually, but not exclusively, finds the mentor in the senior
position (but see, for instance, Coutu (2000) on ‘reverse mentoring’). The venerable
distinction between ‘peer-led’ and ‘adult-led’ mentoring for youth lies here too
(Shiner, 1999; Mellanby et al, 2000).

Status similarities and distinctions will not in themselves account for all the variations
in the success of the mentoring match. Status differences describe both the intrepid
leap envisioned in mentoring and the stubborn obstacle confronting it. The model
needs to be enlarged to consider more closely the nature of the interrelationship.

ii) Mentor and mentee reference group/social identity

Having envisaged mentoring in terms of status gaps and status shifts, we turn to
notions that describe the limitations on status mobility. In broad terms, the next core
concept describes the ‘orientation to change’ that the partners bring to the mentoring
relationship. Put simply, the task is to try and capture some crucial differences in the
motives, and perhaps motivation, with which the mentee enters the relationship. Are
they willing horses? Or do they need to be dragged to the water and, even then, will
they drink? Similarly, one can anticipate rather different orientations on the part of the
mentor. Mentoring is generally considered one of the gentler forms of persuasion but
the literature identifies contrasting expectations about whether mentors should
advocate or abrogate their own status perspective.

The partner’s hopes, motivations, aspirations, wants, expectations etc. can be
understood in a variety of ways and according to a range of theoretical perspectives,
so the ground needs to be cleared rather more thoroughly. In trying to formulate the
appropriate terminology, I steer clear of the material pertaining to ‘psychological’
propensities. No doubt, the likelihood of shaking or stirring of mentees depends on
their personalities but that is not quite the conceptual cocktail I have in mind here.
Likewise, mentors are also portrayed in terms of their proclivity to ‘answer the call’,
though the key virtue is often described as kindliness rather than saintliness
(Friedman, 1993). One difficulty of focusing on individual character is that relatively
little existing information is to be gleaned that pertains to the matching of partners
personality trait by personality trait (see Fagenson-Eland and Baugh (2001) on the
dearth of empirical material). Indeed, even those very many accounts which
acknowledge the importance of the ‘spark’ between mentor and mentee are likely to
concede that the exact formula for this ‘chemistry’ remains elusive; indeed boiling
down to that mysterious, indefinable ‘je ne sais quoi’ (Jackson et al, 2003).
Significant as they may be, then, subtle differences in mentee personality are one of
those nuances that this particular review will omit5.

There is, however, another important frame of reference in the existing discussion for
describing mentee aspirations and this belongs to ‘social identity’ and ‘reference
group’ literatures (Rosenberg, 1979; Merton, 1968). As already argued, mentoring, at
root, is about changing status, and this further family of concepts describes the
likelihood of being budged. In the analysis to follow we shall discover endless
accounts of how the success of mentoring turns minutely on the mentee’s appetite for
change. The basic concept is that mentees come to the relationship with different
levels of identification with their present status and this ‘reference group affiliation’ is

5 Research synthesis must always choose its ground; it is simply impossible to review everything,
Realist synthesis marks its boundary by selecting only specific propositions to be put to the test.
a key to determining whether, how and in what respects they might be persuaded or helped to change. The capacity for change is intimately bound up with ‘social identity’ (rather than with individual character) because this ‘social self’ is defined in terms of group loyalties. Hence, on this account, the success or otherwise of mentoring is governed by the mentees’ allegiances: who do they see as their allies and enemies?

Reference group theory generates its explanatory power by distinguishing different levels of affiliation to an in-group, and associated differences in levels of hostility to an out-group (Merton, 1968). The classic distinction in this respect is often expressed as a three-fold division expressing differences in acquiescence with respect to current status (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Mentee’s reference group affiliation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspiration (readiness/candidature for change)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acquiescence (resilience/inertia against change)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antagonism (resistance/hostility to change)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If we start from the bottom of a ‘subordinate’ status group, we begin with those whose identity is totally bound up with their own kind. They are disaffected outsiders, steadfastly opposed to the ‘superior’ group and thus resistant or hostile to any overtures coming from that direction. Then there will be individuals with some detachment from status rivalries, who are acquiescent enough with their own place in life. They have staying power and resilience, and are thus indifferent to pressures or platitudes from above. At the top of the column there is a sub-group impatient with its own fortunes, and who see benefit from in-group association and affiliation. This is a sub-group containing willing candidates for change, and those ready to receive advice on how to do so.

The intended usage of this alliterative trio of ambitions is much the same as with the status distinctions made earlier. It is produced at a middle level of abstraction so that it can be applied in reviewing the potential change in status confronting any mentee in respect of any mentoring scheme in any policy domain. As before, there will undoubtedly be cases in which the urge to swim, tread water or sink are much more subtle than a three-fold distinction can convey. But, once again, the distinction is forwarded in the knowledge that similar frameworks are used frequently in the mentoring literature (Philip and Hendry, 2000), and thus in the expectation that it can be used as a conceptual frame with which to compare empirical evidence from scheme to scheme.

Mentors also bring social identity to their role. For the most part, they have a different status from their protégés and, for the most part, they are charged with bringing some of the advantages of that status to bear on those protégés. But it is quite clear from the literature that they use this purported benefit of status in quite different ways. Again, one can begin to array the mentor’s commitment to his or her own position along a continuum. In some cases the mentor is deemed to act as a role model, to beckon the mentor ‘come hither, do as I do’. In other cases, mentors act more passively. Their own status is not conceived as a goal for the protégé, but rather as an available resource. Mentees are expected to ‘come and go, and do as you choose’. Finally, the
darker side of mentoring enters the picture in a literature acknowledging that mentors occasionally act in their own interests and employ distancing and manipulative behaviour (Scandura, 1998; Feldman 1999; Eby et al, 2000). Here, the mentoring contact carries the covert message, ‘come off it, do not enter’.

The range of the mentor’s reference group orientations is depicted in Figure 3. In this case the yardstick indicates motivational differences in respect of welcoming or countermirning entry to their own status position. The usual limitations concerning abstraction and over-simplification apply.

**Figure 3: Mentor’s reference group affiliation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advocate (proselytising for entry)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous (laissez faire on entry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antipathy (obstructionist on entry)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**iii) Mentoring mechanisms**

So far we have discussed the mentoring partnership in terms of the status of the partners and their orientation to that status. It goes without saying that reviewing what makes for a successful relationship will also depend on what flows between the partners, that is to say the nature of the interaction. The third key concept thus attempts to capture evidence in respect of this vital characteristic, namely the active mechanism or the function of the mentoring relationship.

Being a mentor is an ongoing responsibility, and in performing that role the mentor will be guided by a range of instincts and ideas. Being a mentee is an ongoing responsibility, and in performing that role the mentee will be guided by a range of instincts and ideas. Out of these two sets of perceptions develops a whole range of interpersonal activities which could be the trigger to change (the description thereof has already begun in the second ‘infinitely long list’ on p1). In trying to classify the countless deeds done in the name of mentoring, the aim once again is to refine and define a particular dimension that offers some simple, readily observable distinction and yet one that is profound enough to explain difference in programme outcomes.

So what actually goes on within mentoring that has the power to influence the mentee? What do mentors and protégés actually do in the expectation that it will bring about individual change? Once again there is a whole range of ways of capturing the flows of the day to day conduct of the partnership. In this instance, I focus on what the partnership is intending to achieve rather than the precise means of delivery. This means that the review makes no attempt to cover the logistics and mechanics of mentoring in terms of events, meetings, schedules, duration, and management of the relationship etc. And once again, this initial decision leads me away from delving into the personality mix of the partners for much the same reason as before. Many studies, for instance, reveal the importance of being able to ‘get along’ as a key to relationship building but analysis goes no further than vignettes and anecdotes (Broome, 1996; Wilson and Johnson, 2001; Kalbfleisch, 2002). Good old fatal attraction is hardly something that can be predicted and encoded into programme planning.
The realist approach always begins by trying to identify programme mechanisms and by discovering exactly what it is about an initiative that works. Much more than in any other type of social programme, interpersonal relationships between stakeholders embody the intervention. They are the resource that is intended to bring about change. Accordingly, the dimension of the association that I want to single out as the engine of change is the intended ‘function’ of mentoring. In highlighting this dimension, I draw on a range of rather similar typologies and classifications (Kram, 1985: Eby, 1997) that make distinctions in respect of the ‘type’ or ‘approach’ to mentoring. I imitate and compress several such attempts with the simple schema in Figure 4.

**Figure 4: A basic typology of mentoring mechanisms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>advocacy</th>
<th>(positional resources)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>coaching</td>
<td>(aptitudinal resources)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>direction setting</td>
<td>(cognitive resources)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affective contacts</td>
<td>(emotional resources)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Starting at the bottom, it is apparent that some mentors see their primary role as offering the hand of friendship: they work in the affective domain trying to make mentees feel differently about themselves. Others provide cognitive resources, offering advice and a guiding hand though the difficult choices confronting the mentee. Still others place hands on the mentees’ shoulders – encouraging, pushing and coaxing their protégés into practical gains, skills and qualifications. And in the uppermost box, some mentors grab the mentees’ hands, introducing them to this network, sponsoring them in that opportunity, using the institutional wherewithal at their disposal. In all cases the mentoring relationship takes root, and change begins, only if the mentee takes willingly the hand that is offered.

The familiar qualifications, of course, apply. This quartet of relationships is meant to have face validity, some common sense appeal. This time I have (only just) resisted the catchy alliteration (soul-mate, spirit-guide, savant, sponsor!). As per usual, there are undoubtedly some applications of the mentor function that do not sit tidily in the four categories. Additionally, as was the case with ‘status’, there are many instances of mentors performing multiple or combined roles. To foreshadow one of theories to be tested later, it may be that there are objectives in which mentoring succeeds only if it provides emotional and cognitive and aptitudinal and positional support. All this notwithstanding, the main claim again is that this classification offers a further workable device to begin to explore the efficacy of different mentoring relationships.
Part II. An Initial Explanatory Model

The next stage in realist synthesis is to place these conceptual fragments together in a theoretical model: for it is the model that does the work of explanatory synthesis; it is the model that identifies the relevant primary inquiries from the multifarious studies that make up the evidence base; and it is the model that pulls together and shapes the advice on offer to the policy community.

The first step in constructing a model to explain what makes for a good mentoring match is depicted in Figure 5. It describes some of the key hurdles that mentoring aims to surmount, as well as placing the mentor and mentee within the obstacle course. As can be seen, it is essentially a conceptual matrix formed by the combination of the concepts of ‘status’ and ‘reference group’ and is thus an amalgamation of Figures 1, 2 and 3.

Figure 5: Key positions and hurdles in mentoring initiatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor Reference Group</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Mentee Reference Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insider (full member)</td>
<td>Marginal (provisional member)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advocate (proselytiser)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>autonomous (laissez faire)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antipathy (obstructionist)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the head of the matrix (the rows) is the all-pervasive status distinction. As noted above, we can make a rough and ready description of any mentoring intervention by locating the partners in their respective status positions. The new figure retains the status assignment of mentor and protégé and, via the columns, their reference group affiliation is added. The grid can now be used to locate the respective social positioning of the associates in any mentoring relationship. As a rule, most mentors will occupy the higher status positions and will invite, or at least not seek to obstruct,

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6 It is worth recalling the methodological contention here. The ‘theory’ being marshalled is literature-based in that the key concepts are to be found in extant studies and commentaries. However, the exact formulation of the model is a matter for the insight and judgement of the reviewer. Most of the theories on offer in the existing literature are used to explain a specific signature of outputs and outcomes in specific mentoring interventions. The reviewer selects those which seem to have the widest explanatory scope, and fits them together in an overall model whose purpose is to explain the general run rather than the specific instance. The model begins to advance beyond the piecemeal and towards the universal:

- by pulling in the findings from further studies which extend the explanatory compass of original authors’ case studies
- by demonstrating further cases in which these explanations do not apply and thus indicating the scope and limitations of the original theories
- by combining theories to attempt to maximise explanatory scope and detail
- by adjudicating between theories in order to explain what works for whom in what circumstances

the entry of their mentees to these positions (as a first approximation, they might be expected to occupy boxes 1, 2, 4 and 5). As a rule, most mentees will occupy lower status positions, though they might be expected to betray the full range of loyalties to those positions (as a first approximation, they might be expected to occupy boxes 2, 3, 5, 6, 8 and 9). Rules always have exceptions of course, and a particular configuration that will be of interest in the review proper is the peer support partnership in which mentor and mentee share the same status, with both being located down the column 3, 6, and 9. And even beyond these permutations are the perverse examples of reverse mentoring, already noted, when the boss at (1) becomes a protégé on the shop floor (3).

The grid can also be used, potentially, to map all variations in mentoring objectives. This goal of mentoring may be portrayed, quite simply, in terms of a de facto ‘origin’ and intended ‘destination’ for the protégé. Here the cell entries take their meaning in terms of the mentees’ social identity. Perhaps the simplest example would be a company mentoring scheme designed to take aspirant middle-managers (2) into the boardroom (1). Programmes dealing with the same ‘problem’ might have different aspirations in terms of status and reference group change. Take two initiatives dealing with disaffected, long-term drug abusers located at (9). The first, ambitiously, might attempt to influence them to go completely ‘clean’ and thus move across to insider, anti-drugs status (1). The second might concentrate on ‘harm reduction’, assuming that drug taking would continue but aiming for an increased consideration of its wider effects on others (6 and 3).

Sometimes, a programme will consider no movement across the grid as the goal. For sexually inexperienced but curious youngsters (at 6 or 3), a mentor in a sex education programme might aim to prolong abstinence and keep them as outsiders (at 6 or 3). Other sex education programmes might be aimed at this same group (at 6 and 3) with the aim of a gradual introduction to sexual relations in a disease- and pregnancy-aware, and thus ‘insider’, manner (2 to 1). Yet other sex education programmes might be targeted at older adolescents who are already engaged in promiscuous, unprotected sex. Such subjects might be regarded as ‘outsiders’ (at 9) in a rather different sense, in which case a safe-sex destination (6) rather than an attack on promiscuity might be chosen as the programme objective.

These illustrations, of course, are intended to be just that. Later in the paper we will encounter the difficult judgements that are needed to apply the evidence on real programmes to the grid. The major proviso at this stage is to note, via these examples, that the status and reference group distinctions take their meaning with respect to the aims of an intervention and its participants, and are not supposed to be universal, societal rankings. The example in the previous paragraph uncovers a rather salutary lesson; namely, beware the dangers of ‘label naïveté’ (Øvretveit and Gustafson, 2002). Mentoring programmes with the same title and the same clientele can harbour substantially different ambitions in respect of anticipated shifts in behaviour, and it is important for decision makers and research synthesisers to recognise the many and varied ambitions of mentors, mentees and programmes.

This paper is hardly the first to recognise that there are many different objectives of mentoring. The literature has many typologies of different forms of mentoring and the various forms can also be mapped onto the matrix, as illustrated in Figure 6. One
distinction, alluded to by several authors, is that between ‘engagement mentoring’, ‘achievement mentoring’ and ‘identity mentoring’. Identity mentoring starts with emotional contact and engages with the ideas of the mentees, in particular in terms of how they see themselves. Building resilience and encouraging a mentee to shift from hostility through calm and perhaps to aspiration (vertical arrow) is thus the ultimate ambition of this variety of mentoring. Achievement mentoring promotes gains in status, namely entry into an insider network and escape from marginal activities and outsider status. The means to this end are usually conceived in terms of raising qualifications and skills and patterns of association to levels commensurate with insider status. Engagement mentoring involves shifts in fortitude and fortune, and requires movement along both status and reference group dimensions (diagonal arrow) and would seem to require the complete repertoire of mentoring mobility.

**Figure 6: Basic varieties of mentoring**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentee Status</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insider</td>
<td>Marginal</td>
<td>Outsider</td>
<td>Mentee Reference Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>aspirational (candidature)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>acquiescence (resilience)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>antagonism (resistance)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that this trio of targets is not intended to be exhaustive; the point is merely to produce a model capable of dealing with a variety of origins and destinations. For instance, it would be quite possible to add a mode of ‘disengagement mentoring’ to the types. In the main body of the review ‘chronic illness support groups’ will be encountered, and their basic ambition is to support the ‘descent’ into outsider status by building resilience and resistance. The intended pathway runs in the opposite direction along the diagonal.

And as with the previous discussion, note that these pathways are only meant to be indicative. In particular, the arrow positions in Figure 6 are only for illustration’s sake. Thus, personal mentoring could be signified by any vertical move of any magnitude from any status position. Achievement mentoring is constituted by any horizontal shift on the grid. Engagement mentoring may, in principle, be achieved by any contributory shift along the diagonal vector. In a similar manner other mentoring variations drawn routinely in the literature, such as Kram’s (Kram and Isabella, 1985; Scandura, 1992) three types (‘career’, ‘psycho-social’, ‘role model’) and the venerable ‘formal’ versus ‘informal’ distinction (Noe, 1988; Zimmerman et al 2002), can be mapped onto the diagram.
The next addition to our initial explanatory model is to factor in the implications of the distinctions made earlier in terms of the mechanisms of mentoring. To be sure, there are very different ways in which mentors go about their business, but can we produce any hypotheses about which function will be effective in which circumstances? In particular, can the four mentor resources differentiated above (positional, aptitudinal, cognitive and affective) be affixed to the matrix of status and reference group positions as in Figures 5 and 6?

This is attempted in Figures 7 and 8, which focus in tightly on the specific boxes within the general matrix. Figure 7 considers the main mechanisms required to engender status change, though I commence with the perpetual reminder that these are abstractions. It will need some care and imagination to apply them to real mentoring programmes, and to find them in pages of research reports.

**Figure 7: The mechanisms of status change**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor Reference Group</th>
<th>Insider (full member)</th>
<th>Marginal (provisional member)</th>
<th>Outsider (non-member)</th>
<th>Mentee Reference Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>advocate (proselytiser)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>aspirational (candidature)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>autonomous (laissez faire)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>acquiescence (resilience)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antipathy (obstructionist)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>antagonism (resistance)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Broadly speaking, so says status group theory, to move from being an outsider to an insider requires

a) in-group qualifications, and
b) in-group associations

In so far as such resources can be supplied by mentors, this will involve them in:

a) Coaching, cajoling, coaxing the mentee into acquiring the skills, assets, credentials and testimonials required to gain entry.

b) Advocating, sponsoring, networking on behalf of the mentee to gain the requisite insider contacts.

Recall that we are contemplating travel across any and all status distinctions and so the coaching may involve all manner of informal guidance and formal training, while the advocacy may involve words in high place or whispers in ears. Likewise, aptitudinal shifts may be marked by actual qualifications (managers gaining MBAs) or by behavioural accommodation (probationers observing the residential curfew), and the networking gains may be a matter of entry keys (to executive lofts) or exit...
(from dealer’s patch). Figure 8 considers the mechanisms of engendering reference group change. Broadly speaking, so says reference group theory, the move from being hostile-to-change to a candidate-for-change requires a shift in:

a) emotional loyalties, and
b) forward-thinking

In so far as these functions can be supplied in mentoring, they will involve:

a) Creating bonds of trust and the sharing of new experiences so that mentees reflect upon their relatively narrow range of loyalties and values.
b) Promoting a sense of self reflection through the discussion of alternatives, direction setting and so on.

As above, one would expect the precise details of these encounters to vary from situation to situation. So, for instance, work in the cognitive and emotional sphere may be directed at a young person in preparation for departure from outsider status, or for the arrival of a dying patient into that status.

**Figure 8: The mechanisms of reference group change**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor Social Identity (motivation)</th>
<th>Insider (full member)</th>
<th>Marginal (provisional member)</th>
<th>Outsider (non-member)</th>
<th>Mentee Social Identity (motivation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>advocate (proselytiser)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>aspirational (candidature)</td>
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<td>antipathy (obstructionist)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>antagonism (resistance)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cognitive resources (direction-setting)  Affective resources (befriending)

At this stage, and no doubt somewhat pragmatically and capriciously, the model building is drawn to a close. We now come to its purpose. Of course, it should have some consonance with, and be able to re-describe, conceptualisations of mentoring that already exist in the literature. The main objective, however, is to use the models and propositions embedded in Figures 1 through 8 to articulate some theories that will explain the successes and failures of different mentoring relationships. The concepts of ‘relative social status’, ‘reference group identity’ and ‘mentoring mechanism’ all have explanatory power and, applied in appropriate combinations, can be used to generate hypotheses on what it is about mentoring that works for whom in what circumstances and in what respects. These can then be tested and refined by combing
through the available literature to see to what extent they are supported\(^7\). A brief initial selection of a baker’s dozen hypotheses ‘in play’ and ‘to be refined’ is presented in Box 1.

**Box 1: Initial theories derived from the model**

1. Successful mentoring relationships have to supply the apposite range, sequence and balance of change mechanisms to match the intended shift in the mentee’s standing and thinking. (*This is the most general theory*)
2. Unsuccessful relationships follow from the application of inappropriate or inadequate or ill-timed mechanisms. (*The converse*)
3. The mentor’s status and reference group identity will restrict the resources that s/he is able to bring to the relationship and thus limit his or her ‘reach’ across the entire matrix of mentee positions.
4. The mentee’s status and reference group identity will restrict his or her potential to respond to resources offered from certain status and reference group positions.
5. The mentor’s status and reference group should correspond to the intended destination of the mentee; mentors should embody the intended change.
6. Pairings that deliver well on one mentoring mechanism are often weak on another, e.g. a good match on emotional grounds may not be able to promote positional shifts.
7. The more status and reference group origins and destinations are catered for by the single programme, the less is it likely to accommodate and phase in the requisite pathways to change.
8. Exactly corresponding mentor and mentee grid positioning (true peers) results in a null move. Peer support operates within status bands and can only accommodate a change in reference group identity.
9. The mentor’s ability to deliver appropriate resources is not only conditioned by his or her present status and reference group positions but also by previous experience (or trajectory). It may be beneficial to have preceded the mentee along the intended pathway.
10. Long moves across several status and identity positions (engagement) are the most difficult to achieve and may falter at any of the intermediate stages.
11. Long moves are the sum of smaller steps, and therefore it is hard to personify the requisite resources in an individual mentor.
12. To gather the appropriate resources to facilitate the long move, a mentor will have to call on additional resources as well as engaging with the mentee.
13. Long moves do not, in fact, proceed along the diagonal but go up and then across. The emotional lift is needed before the positional shift (and is thus harder to achieve in formal interventions and relationships).

\(^7\) A couple of important methodological points here:

- The theories produced at this stage are not simply gathered and regurgitated from the literature. The model is the tool for synthesis. The theories generated here are expressed in terms of, and thus are derived from, the model (and so, minimally, are re-articulations and re-workings of extant ideas). However, the contribution of the reviewer in creating the propositions is central at this point, and a crucial difference (namely in the application of creativity and judgement) is acknowledged with other forms of systematic review.

- The presentation of the synthesis is difficult because the process of going back and forth from hypothesis to evidence results in the continuous refinement of those hypotheses. This report, inevitably and like all scientific research, tidies up that process by freezing the running order of hypotheses and evidence.
Part III. Evidence Synthesis: Pulling Together Diverse Findings

The thirteen statements in Box 1 should be regarded as exploratory hypotheses. They are intended to orient and sensitise the reviewer’s gaze. One deliberate feature is the formulation at a middle level of abstraction, so that they can be interrogated using a range of empirical materials from an assortment of existing research (Pawson, 2000). They meet the purpose of a theory-driven synthesis in that they are presented in a form that allows testing and refining against the whole crop of bygone evidence.

Mentoring interventions are ubiquitous and present the reviewer with a potentially infinite numbers of reports, studies, evaluations, and commentaries. The methodological basis for selecting studies for closer review (namely, purposive sampling of the studies best placed to test the theory under review) is discussed elsewhere (Pawson et al, 2004).

In this instance, such a strategy involves, first of all, homing in on those studies that have paid attention to:
- The nature of the relationship between peer and mentor

Within this broad remit, studies are then selected, that:
- Contain information relevant to ‘status differences’, ‘reference group differences’ and ‘mentor strategy’

And within that sub-group, studies are especially sought that:
- Contain and explore contrasts in mentor and mentee relationships
- Offer findings about the relative success and failures of different partnerships

And, finally, cognisant of the tension between the need for thoroughness in a review and the faltering marginal policy utility of covering more and more studies, an artificial cap has been placed on the number of inquiries brought into the analysis. This is done on the basis of a bold claim that they:
- Represent a strategically selected set of studies optimally placed to provide a detailed and severe test of theories under review

Realist synthesis lays great stress on careful and detailed analysis of the inferences that can be drawn from the primary studies. This section of the report is thus by far the longest and has a structure designed to tease out and test the complex body of theories that go to make a mentoring intervention. Clearly it is impossible to keep thirteen hypotheses on the boil throughout the analysis. Different studies will have something to say about one, two, half-a-dozen or all of them. Rather than trying to keep a running tally, the reporting and analysis of the primary studies is organised into two Sections and four further sub-sections or Blocks.

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A further methodological point is of interest here. The original studies may or may not have been conceived in terms of the precise hypotheses and terminology that is put to them here (though it usually is the case that the original authors are pursuing ‘similar’ concerns and ‘adjacent’ hypotheses). Sometimes, therefore, the requisite information will be served on a plate. At others, the reviewer will have to dig rather deep and make inferential leaps into original findings.
Section I concentrates on hypotheses 10 to 13; those relating to ‘engagement mentoring’ for youth and the difficulty of ‘long moves’. All the studies here relate to formally established youth mentoring programmes and so there is only one Block of primary material. This is an appropriate starting point because it represents the most daunting challenge for mentoring and thus can be considered a critical case. These hypotheses, as can be seen, predict that success will be relatively scarce, and useful policy lessons are to be learned by discovering what might transform rarity into potentiality.

Section II examines hypotheses 3 to 8, looking at the vexed question of what makes a good ‘match’ between mentor and mentee. In this case, it is appropriate to draw in a wide spectrum of different types of mentoring relationship, and so examples are drawn from three further blocks of primary studies. Block 2 examines peer support programmes in sex and HIV/AIDS education and drug misuse. Block 3 tackles corporate mentoring schemes. Block 4 inspects illness support groups. Youth mentoring also has interesting lessons about mentoring matches and so Block 1 is also reprised in this section. The starting assumption of this particular synthesis is that there is no single or simple formula for matching mentor and mentee. And the purpose of reviewing such a diversity of programmes is to bring into relief the different kinds of matches required for different objectives and circumstance, i.e. the classic realist question of ‘what works for whom in what circumstances and in what respects’.

This leaves us with hypotheses 1 and 2 in Box 1 which are labelled as the most ‘general’ of our starting propositions. As succinct initial statements, there is a sense in which they say no more than mentoring must put the appropriate tools in place to do the job. But what they are getting at, of course, is the spectrum of mentoring mechanisms, from befriending to direction setting to coaching to advocacy. And the question posed in these hypotheses is about finding and administering the right admixture of these to do the job. In this sense then, they remain the most general and flexible of our hypotheses are thus attended to in all the cases that follow.

As a final and crucial analytic preamble (and so not relegated to a methodological footnote) it is necessary to alert the reader to what to expect by way of ‘synthesis’. What is involved in the subsequent examination of the available studies? Clearly, there is no ‘aggregation’ of findings, no ‘pooling’ of net effects, no search for ‘best practices’, no setting of implementation ‘guidelines’. Synthesis, here, means quite simply the further exploration of these core theories.

Each study will throw new light on these propositions. Enlightenment will not take the form of proof or refutation, but of refinement of the statements. Each study will better position the proposition under test; each study will sharpen the focus of the explanation; each study will limit over-generalisation; each study will be used to make sense of the others. As we shall see, there are differences, tensions and even contradictions between these original sources, and so there is also some adjudication and reconciliation to be done by way of analysis. In short, the key rationale of what follows is explanatory synthesis.

The paper now moves to an analysis of 25 primary studies organised in the two Sections and four Blocks as described above. The intention is to describe each study
briefly, to interrogate its findings in the light of the review model and in so doing add depth and nuance to that model. Brief summaries of the progress of the various theories are interspersed as a tailpiece to each case, and at the end of each Block. A final summary then pulls together the refinements in the model and presents them as recommendations to the policy maker on the targeting and implementation of mentoring interventions.

Section I: The Dynamics of Engagement Mentoring

Block 1. Long move studies

This group of studies is about engagement mentoring: dealing with ‘disaffected’, ‘high-risk’ youth and trying to move them into the mainstream via value and positional shifts. To repeat for emphasis, this initial Block of reviews is not a ‘synthesis of youth mentoring’ as such. It is a dissection of studies which throw light on the precise changes engendered in successful youth mentoring, about what the relationship must contrive to do to bring about change, and about who is best placed to deliver and receive the apparatus of change.


This is an evaluation of project RESCUE (Reaching Each Students Capacity Utilizing Education). Eighteen mentor-mentee dyads were investigated from a small, incorporated city in Los Angeles with high rates of youth and violent crime. The aims of the programme are described in classic ‘long move’ terms: ‘The purpose of this relationship is to provide a supportive adult role model, who will encourage the youth’s social and emotional development, help improve his/her academic and career motivation, expand the youth’s life experiences, redirect the youth from at-risk behaviours, and foster improved self-esteem’. A curious, and far from incidental point, is that the volunteer mentors on the programme were all fire fighters.

It is a ‘qualitative’ evaluation (meaning analysis consisting of ‘group interview’ data and ‘case studies’). There is a claim in the abstract that the mentees are shown to secure ‘concrete benefits’, but these are mentioned only as part of the case study narratives, there being no attempt to chart inputs, outputs and outcomes. The findings are, in the author’s words, ‘overwhelmingly positive’. The only hint of negativity comes in a reply to a questionnaire item about whether the mentees would like to change anything about the programme. ‘All but three mentees answered the question with a “No” response’. Two of these malcontents merely wanted more “outings” and the third, more “communication”’. The research could be discounted as soppy, feel-good stuff, especially as all of the key case study claims are in the researcher’s voice. (e.g. ‘the once sullen, hostile, defensive young woman now enters the agency office with hugs for staff members, a happy disposition and open communication with adult staff members and the youth she serves in her agency position’). The case studies, do however, provide a very clear account of an unfolding sequence of mentoring mechanisms:
Joe had been raised in a very chaotic household with his mother as the primary parent, his father’s presence erratic... He was clearly heading towards greater gang involvement... He had, in fact, begun drinking (with a breakfast consisting of a beer), demonstrated little interest in school and was often truant... The Mentor Program and the Captain who became his mentor were ideal for Joe, who had earlier expressed a desire to become a firefighter. The mentor not only served as a professional role model, but provided the nurturing father figure missing from his life. Besides spending time together socially, his mentor helped him train, prepare and discipline himself for the Fire Examiners test. Joe was one of the few who passed the test (which is the same as the physical test given to firefighters). A change in attitude, perception of his life, and attitudes and life goals was evident... [further long, long story omitted] He also enrolled at the local junior college in classes (e.g. for paramedics) to prepare for the firefighters’ examination and entry into the firefighters academy. He was subsequently admitted to the fire department as a trainee. [my insertion]

What we have here is a pretty full account of a successful ‘long move’ and the application of all of the attendant mechanisms – moving from affective contacts (emotional resources) to direction setting (cognitive resources) to coaching (aptitudinal resources) to advocacy (positional resources). The vital point for the review is that this particular mentor (‘many years of experience training the new, young auxiliary firefighters as well as the younger Fire explorers’) was quite uniquely positioned. As Joe climbs life’s ladder away from his morning beer, the Captain is able to provide all the resources needed to meet all his attitudinal, aptitudinal, and training needs. How frequently such a state of affairs applies is a moot point, and acknowledged only in the final moments of the paper.

In its defence, one can point to two more plausible claims, indeed ones that square with subsequent studies. There is a constant refrain about precise circumstantial triggers and points of interpersonal congruity that provide the seeds of change:

It was at this point [end of lovingly described string of bust-ups] that Gina entered the Mentor programme and was paired with a female firefighter. The match was a perfect one in that the firefighter was seen as ‘tough’ and was quickly able to gain Gina’s confidence. [my insertion]

There is also an emphasis via the case study format (the narrative) on the holistic and cumulative nature of the successful encounter. ‘The responses and case descriptions do provide a constellation of concrete and psychosocial factors which the participants felt contributed to their development and success.’ [my emphasis]

This example provides close confirmation of the long-moves-work-by-little-steps theory in that the 9 to 6, 6 to 3, 3 to 2, and 2 to 1, shifts are all spelled out closely in Joe’s story. Read at face value it gives the lie to the long-movers-are-rare theory, but there is nothing in the account to suggest a general panacea and much to suggest a special case.

Here we transfer from American optimism to British pessimism via the use of the same research strategy. The evidence here is drawn from a study of a UK government scheme (New Beginnings) which, in addition to basic skills training and work placement schemes, offered a modest shot of mentoring (one hour per week). This scheme is one of several in the UK mounted out of a realisation that disaffected youth have multiple, deep-seated problems and thus ‘holistic’ or ‘joined up’ service provision is required to have any hope of dealing with them. Colley’s study takes the form of series of qualitative ‘stories’ (her term) about flashpoints within the scheme. She selects cases in which the mentor ‘demonstrated an holistic person-centred commitment to put the concerns of the mentee before those of the scheme’, and discovered that ‘sooner or later these relationships break down’. The following quotations provide typical extracts from ‘Adrian’s story’:

Adrian spoke about his experience of mentoring with evangelical fervour: ‘To be honest, I think anyone who’s in my position with meeting people, being around people even, I think a mentor is one of the greatest things you can have… If I wouldn’t have had Pat, I think I’d still have problems at home… You know, she’s put my life in a whole different perspective.

Adrian was sacked from the scheme after 13 weeks. He was placed in an office as filing clerk and dismissed because of lateness and absence. Colley reports that, despite his profuse excuses, the staff felt he was ‘swinging the lead’. Pat (the mentor) figured otherwise: ‘Pat, a former personnel manager and now student teacher, was concerned that Adrian had unidentified learning difficulties that were causing him to miss work though fear of getting things wrong. She tried to advocate on his behalf with New Beginnings staff, to no avail.’ At this point Adrian was removed from the scheme.

From the point of view of the review theory, there is an elementary ‘fit’. Pat is apparently able to provide emotional support (illustrated in spades) and a raising of aspirations (claimed in the text but not actually supported in Adrian’s words) but cannot provide advocacy and coaching. On this particular scheme, the latter are not in the mentor’s gift but the responsibility of other New Beginnings staff (their faltering, bureaucratic efforts being also briefly described).

But in this case, the inevitability of mentoring not being able to reach further goals on employability is assumed. This proposition is supported in a substantial passage of ‘theorising’ about the ‘dialectical interplay between structure and agency’, via Bourdieu’s concept ‘habitus’, which is explained as follows:

…a structuring structure, which organises practices and the perceptions of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalisation of the division into social classes.
Put in more downright terms, this means that because of the way capitalist society is organised the best this kind of kid will get is a shit job, and whatever they do will be taken as a sign that they barely deserve that. In Colley’s words, ‘As the case studies illustrate, the task of altering habitus is simply unfeasible in many cases, and certainly not to a set timetable’.

It is arguable that this interpretative overlay derives more from the author’s self-acknowledged Marxist/feminist standpoint than from the empirical case studies presented9. There is also a further very awkward methodological aspect for the reviewer in a ‘relativistic’ moment often seen in qualitative work, when in the introduction to her case studies Colley acknowledges that her reading of them is ‘among many interpretations they offer’.

There are huge ambiguities here, normally shoved under the carpet in a systematic review. Explanation by (transitive verb) ‘theorising’ and an underlying ‘constructivism’ in data presentation are not the stuff of study selection and quality appraisal. Realist synthesis plays by another set of rules, which are about drawing warrantable inferences from the data presented. Thus, sticking just to Colley’s case studies in this paper, they have value to an explanatory review because they exemplify in close relief some of the difficulties of ‘long move’ mentoring. In the accounts presented, the mentor is able to make headway in terms of befriending and influencing vision but these gains are stalled or even thwarted by programme objectives on training and employment. What they show is the sheer difficulty that an individual mentor faces in trying to compensate for lives scarred by poverty and lack of opportunity. Whether they demonstrate the ‘futility’ or ‘unfeasibility’ of trying to do so, and the unfaltering grip of capitalist habitus and social control, is a somewhat bolder inference. The jury (and this review) is still out on that question.

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This paper is further exemplification of the long-moves-work-by-little-steps theory but demonstrates that the emotional progress made from 9 to 6 to 3 is not maintained in the material gains 3 to 2 to 1. In this case the programme is organised so that the practitioners (mentor and employment professionals) have different responsibilities for these respective pathways, which fail to gel (indeed, contradict in the author’s opinion). This gives some support to those propositions suggesting the limited reach of mentors with different positions in the matrix. Assessing the inevitability or otherwise of relationship collapses is clearly a key aspect to be investigated through further primary studies, as is the significance of other agencies in the mentoring relationship.

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9 Studies 1.1 and 1.2 provide severe challenges to the reviewer and are presented together at the beginning of the review to reveal just that. Are they dogma rather than data, and should they really be apportioned to the pile of methodological quality assurance rejects as in Cochrane and Campbell reviews? Working at a distance and with a particular theory to test, the reviewer may in fact be able to draw sound inferences from ‘biased’ studies (see Pawson, 2003). As soon as one removes the respective overlays (rose-tinted and red-flagged), a perfectly reasonable theory emerges from the data presented above about the difficulty (especially at one hour per week!) of rolling the four mentoring mechanisms into one mentor.
This inquiry compares three Scottish schemes. Two, termed the ‘education’ and ‘housing’ projects use planned mentoring; that is to say, the contacts took place as part of the paid activity of a youth worker. The third, a ‘befriending’ project, was undertaken by unpaid volunteers managed by a professional co-ordinator. There are further differences in organisational and funding arrangements, but the clientele and aims are considered sufficiently similar to make a formal comparison. The means to this end is another ‘qualitative study’ concentrating on ‘an account given principally through the eyes of young people of their experiences of mentoring within these settings’.

Headline propositions are as follows:

**Befriending:** It may be useful to look at mentoring as a spectrum of intensity, with the volunteer befriending offering a form of mentoring that focuses on respite and opportunities for shared activities with less troubled or younger children. The voluntary commitment of the befriending was an important element in making the relationship ‘special’ and developing the potential for friendship. Equally it is true that relationships could become isolated if befriending were unwilling to participate in further events, despite the best efforts of the co-ordinator.

**Education and Housing:** [Both] projects offered a higher dosage of mentoring that ultimately aimed to reintegrate young people into the main-stream. Many of the young people had a complex array of difficulties and had contact with a range of professionals with whom mentors often acted as advocates. Unexpectedly, the status of paid workers did not appear to distance them from their clients although it made for a more problematic relationship with other professionals… Such an intensive level of support is unlikely to be possible within a voluntary context. Paradoxically it also demands the flexibility of voluntary commitment in promoting a version of ‘professional friendship. [italics in original]

There seems an approximate fit with some of the review theories here. The befrienders have success with befriending (!) and with ‘providing a space in which to tell their [the mentees’] story and to rehearse what they would do with their lives’ (i.e. direction setting). But befrienders were unable/unwilling to move on status matters: ‘we are not an authority figure, we are not police, we are not social work, we are purely there to give them a bit of fun and take them out of the home situation for a wee while’. This limited jurisdiction may, however, follow from the tender age of many of the mentees in this particular project. Allocations on the housing project were ‘generally in the 16-18 age group’, the education project was ‘for young people in the 12-18 age-group, and the befriending project offered a service for young people aged 5 to 8.

As per review theory, the professional workers are able to act as advocates and problem solvers. They often do this in association with and, sometimes, after
scrapping with, other agencies (compare Colley’s hapless mentor in study 1.2). However, it is claimed that they operate in this domain having first established high levels of personal rapport with the kids. This, the ‘professional friendship’ idea, does not sit particularly well with the developing model, and the theory about the difficulty of a mentor being all things to one person. The report gives some detailed clues on why it might be viable in this particular intervention:

- unusually favourable workloads (to allow frequent contact)
- not ‘grassing’ (‘I wouldn’t be rushing to the police’)
- natural contact in the locality (key workers often lived in the neighbourhood)
- risky pasts (‘being a bit of a tearaway myself’)

These actions and conditions are a first glimpse of some important mini-levers that are not adequately described in the four elemental mentoring mechanisms. They are potential candidates for inclusion in the basic model of the mentoring relationship, on the basis of further investigation in the review.

Philip et al’s study also plays particularly close attention to the roots of youth disaffection and thus to the stop-start mechanics of ‘building up’ a mentoring relationship (a finding we shall see reinforced in study 1.6):

Striking a balance between raising false hopes and lowering expectations is a continuing issue for those working with vulnerable young people. However, mentoring processes may offer an opportunity to tackle this through building up a launch pad and safety net. However, this demands a long-term commitment on the part of mentors in order to support young people to feel safe enough to take risks, to fail and start again.

These rather tentative and tenuous beginnings lead the authors to emphasise the importance of the role mentoring offers in ‘bring[ing] reliance to the surface’. This fits rather neatly with the hypothesis that mentees only shift from antagonism to aspiration through the stage of acquiescence (i.e. the state of being prepared to ‘hang in there’). But this sequence seems to hang by a rather thin thread. As one mentor puts it:

The causes are deep rooted and to iron these out takes time and some of the scars are there and they’ll never disappear, they’ll always be there. And they’ll always affect that person as an individual and it’ll either make them fight like hell or [go] various degrees downward… I think a lot depends on who these young people latch onto and whether they get a leg up or get smacked down. [my insertion]

The report also brings a weight of evidence to bear on the importance of such programmes going beyond one-to-one partnerships and building bridges to other agents and agencies. As well as the aforementioned grapples with welfare agencies, mentors also report an effect on family ties. Despite the fact that family breakdown was commonplace amongst programme subject, Philip et al present some evidence to show that mentoring relationships were complementary to family relationships, a point on which to build. Mentoring provided encouragement and some skills to hang on to precarious relations of the following kind: ‘If I fall out with my mum, I just go to my room. If I fall out with anyone else World War 3 breaks out’.

21
This report typifies the strengths and weaknesses of ‘qualitative’ evaluation. It is strong on testimony, and the explanatory themes noted above are identified very clearly and supported in quotation after quotation, example upon example\textsuperscript{10}. Yet, frustratingly, very little use is made of its comparative structure. Three little introductory sketches of the schemes are offered rather than any systematic comparison of processes, inputs and outputs.

<table>
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<td>4</td>
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Once again this research gives a picture of the rough ride of long haul mentoring. All the mentees are outsiders, although difference in ages and problems probably spreads them across reference groups (3, 6 and 9) and makes some of them easier to reach. Volunteer mentors focus primarily on befriending and direction setting (9 to 6 to 3). These mentors are non-directive and are not authority figures (say 5) but this can render them too detached and toothless to make much headway on activities designed to produce behavioural shifts. The education and housing mentors (relative insiders at say 1) are able to put in place positional resources to commence an uphill battle from outsider status. They may also be able to offer friendship by turning a blind eye (operating as a laissez-faire 4) and by taking advantage of their own experience as disaffected outsiders (6 and 9).


This is a quantitative study attempting to tease out which aspects of the ‘mentoring relationship’ have an effect on ‘perceived benefits’ and ‘relationship continuation’. The former is measured in terms of a series of predictor variables (listed below) about the mentor’s training, the closeness of the relationship, and the type of activities and discussions that take place. The success of the intervention is measured by perceived success (as reported by mentor and mentee) and by relationship continuation (whether it has survived or broken down). The study starts at the point when the mentor and mentee were initially matched and takes further measures at six and twelve months. It is thus aimed at trying to figure out ‘what makes the relationship happen’.

Participants are enrollees in a Big Brother/Big Sister (BBBS) programme and aged 7-14, with 84% from single adult homes and 69% defined as low income (eligible for school lunch support). We will learn more about the BBBS participant profile in subsequent cases; here it is sufficient to note that they span a range of status backgrounds. Nothing is reported on their values, dispositions, identity or reference group on entry to the scheme, but it might be inferred from the usual BBBS long screening process that these are not America’s foremost rebels (see study 1.7 for further details). The main results are presented in a path analysis format but the zero-order correlations in the following simplified table provide the gist of the findings on

\textsuperscript{10} These strengths are very difficult to convey in the potted summary, whose primary purpose is to further the analysis. Hopefully, some indication is conveyed here that this study has strengths in the way that inferences are drawn and supported in thematic and holistic analysis. There is an obvious contrast, say, with study 1.1 in respect of the usage and detail of interview transcripts.
what these youths value. Also note again that the outcome measures are not about improved status via educational or behavioural gains, but relate only to ‘self-reported benefits’ and ‘staying with the programme’.

Table 1: Correlations between predictor measures reported outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor measure</th>
<th>Perceived benefit</th>
<th>Relationship continuation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Youth report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of training</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor efficacy</td>
<td>.31*</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme staff support</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship obstacles</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor/youth contact</td>
<td>.38**/.42**</td>
<td>.24/.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship closeness</td>
<td>.29**/.60***</td>
<td>.50***/.29*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion – youth behaviour</td>
<td>.24/.19</td>
<td>.04/.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion – youth relationships</td>
<td>.16/.17</td>
<td>.17/.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion – casual conversation</td>
<td>.27/.14</td>
<td>.19/.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion – social issues</td>
<td>.18/.07</td>
<td>-.06/.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities – sports/athletic</td>
<td>.13/.38**</td>
<td>.26/.31*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities – recreation/non-athletic</td>
<td>.29*/.32*</td>
<td>.27/.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities – educational/cultural</td>
<td>.30*/.44**</td>
<td>.13/.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The cells with dual scores refer to predictor variables that are rated separately by mentors/mentees. Significance levels indicated by */**/***

So what do these kids like, and what keeps ‘em at it? The quality of the mentor’s training does not figure (small negative coefficients in the first row). These adolescents do not seem to notice or care much about their mentor’s preparation. This contrasts, interestingly, with the mentors’ perception in which there is a strong association (+ .31*, data not shown) between their perceptions of the quality of their training and their own report on the perceived benefits of the partnership11.

Relationship closeness (row 6, as estimated by either mentor or mentee) seems to be most significant factor in terms of utility and bond to the programme. This finding, however, is arguably a tautology with similar reported measures being utilised as both dependent and independent variables (relationship closeness ends up explaining relationship durability!). ‘Amount of contact’ is another factor influencing perceived benefits of, and continuation with, the relationship. Again, this is hardly surprising but the authors note a fit with other research showing that regular and consistent patterns of contact are essential, and that ‘more than half of the relationships studied were not maintained at the agency’s minimum criterion of at least three hours per week.’ A brief reflection back at the previous studies in this review affirms the contribution of

11 Note that the association reported here, in common with many in the report, is between two different sets of perceptions. This makes interpretation of the findings difficult, and one cannot leap from these figures to conclusions about real programme features leading to real programme efficacy. These difficulties of interpretation are compounded when more complex interrelationships are discussed. For example, ‘the composite measure of mentor/youth contact similarly exhibited positive associations with indices of relationship experiences, such as having discussions pertaining to different program-relevant topics (e.g. youth’s behaviour, rs ranging from .48 to .56 for mentor-report and from .46 to .55 for youth report, all ps <.01)’. Now, did you get that over at the Department for Education and Skills?
regular contact to the long haul (recall the struggles of Colley’s one-hour mentors in study 1.2).

‘Activities’ in general (rows 11-13) seem to outstrip ‘discussion’ (rows 7-10) in general in terms of perceived utility and tie to the programme. Mentees who report being engaged in a relationship based on plenty of sports/athletics are significantly more likely to stay with the programme. The study thus begins to pinpoint the precise form of relationship that nurtures the long move in its formative stages. Non-directive, mutual activities in the form of basketball, music and retail grazing are the starting points of relationship building.

The study is of use to the review in giving quantitative confirmation of the significance of some of the inner processes of the mentoring relationship that, heretofore, we had only spotted in qualitative analysis. It is, however, very difficult to interpret because so many of the associations are rooted in self-reports, and there is so much auto-correlation between the so-called explanatory variables.

The mentees here are outsiders but many of them will already be on the move from 9 to 6 to 3 because of programme entry requirements. The study is really about ‘staying with’ the intervention and the consolidation of mentees into a state of readiness (3) for further change. Again, there is a glimpse in the data that professional training of the mentors may distance them from the mentees and that the voluntary status and laissez-faire activities of mentors (at 5) seem to be more crucial in the formative stages.


This is an evaluation of project CHANCE, a programme aimed at primary school children referred with ‘with behavioural problems and other risk factors’. Its key feature was the provision of mentors whose task was to intervene ‘before problems became entrenched, to support and redirect children away from antisocial behaviour, social exclusion and criminal offending.’ It thus has ‘long move’ objectives and is squarely in the domain of ‘engagement mentoring’.

The programme theory specified two ‘stages’ or objectives for mentoring. The first goal was to ‘establish trusting and supportive relationships with the children’. The second was the ‘use of an individualised, solution-focused intervention…aimed to teach lifeskills which encourage independence, active learning and a sense of personal mastery rather than seeking to identify the original causes of the problem.’ These correspond, helpfully, to the ‘emotional’ (befriending) and ‘cognitive’ (direction-setting) shifts in the matrix of mentoring relationship that form the basis of this review.
The research involved an intensive process evaluation using semi-structured interviews with all stakeholders (management, teachers who made referrals, mentors, mentees, mentees’ mothers). There was also an outcome evaluation using a ‘comparison group’ study of children with similar high-risk backgrounds. This part of the study examined behavioural change using standardised measures of school attendance, and exclusion and academic performance.

In the formative evaluation, the befriending goal met with considerable success: children and mentors by and large got on very well. However, the individualised, solution-focused intervention goal was the cause of some confusion, summarised by the authors as follows:

To evaluate how successfully the solution focused stage of mentoring was implemented, mentors were asked about their immediate and longer term goals for the meetings and how the meetings were designed to meet the goals. Responses varied with some planning their meetings with specific goals and clearly working with a strategy in mind. Others appeared to turn up for meeting with little overall idea of where they were going or the steps needed to get there. Interviews with mentors identified some uncertainty in what to target and how to deliver the solution focused stage of mentoring. Some mentors saw themselves as the link between school and home, attended school regularly, took part in case conferences and had set up a close working liaison with the children’s teachers. Others were uncertain how to help with schoolwork, how much to support the child or whether to support the mother in order to help the child.

The outcome evaluation showed no net impact: ‘the mentored children improved in their behaviours but equivalent improvements were found in the comparison group who had not had mentors.’ This finding is based on a comparison of only 25 children in each group and needs to be treated with appropriate caution on that score. In particular there is the difficulty, acknowledged by the authors, that this specific group of children had already been singled out for assistance within the educational system. It is difficult, therefore, to know what levels of attention those who were apportioned to the ‘control’ group received from within the present system. Nevertheless, there were no significant differences observed across a considerable range of measures and, what is more, ‘serious problems continued in both’.

This study also provides a reasonable fit with the review theory. As well as socio-economic deprivation, the mentees (97% male, 50% white) scored highly on a standardised measure of behavioural problems (hyperactivity, conduct and peer problems etc). They are thus ‘outsiders’ in status terms by many a measure and probably more so than in some of the other inquiries featured here. Furthermore, the mentees were all recruited by teacher referral and on these grounds it may be reasonable to infer that they have already resisted change and are, quite possibly, a more antagonistic group than in other cases examined here.

Faced with this situation, the volunteer mentors (80% women, ‘mostly’ white) who were given four days training followed by ‘well-managed’ supervision appear only to be able to make affective shifts (nevertheless deemed important by the researchers). Interestingly, their ability to influence cognitive/direction setting seems mixed and
limited. Further, and unsurprisingly, they do not appear to be able to turn the corner to aptitudinal and positional shifts. An explanation, perhaps, is given rather eloquently in a boxed section on ‘What do mentors do’.

Mentors generally met their children for two to four hours a week, usually a weekend morning or afternoon, giving an average of 120 hours over a year. The most common activities were walks, sports and activities in the park; visits to the cinema, theatre or zoo; home activities such as cooking (in some cases in the mentor’s home), puzzles, making things, computer games; visits to libraries and museums; and just talking. A few mentors involved their mentees in activities with their own children. Most mentors had regular contact with their children’s mothers.

A familiar enough pattern is reported here. Volunteer mentors operating from 5 are able to bond with troubled young people at 9 but not offer the educational or positional activities to change their outsider status. Everyday social activities again seem the basis of these relationships. A noteworthy finding is the failure of an overt cognitive model involved in promoting more self-determination (moving from 6 to 3). This seems to have been an elusive goal, but it may have been due to the ambition/ambiguity of programme theory as well as inappropriate mentor resources to deliver it.


This is a long report of a multi-method evaluation of a complex programme. It is appropriate, therefore, to issue a reminder that this review only pursues material that relates to the model under investigation and that many other important findings on programme implementation, integrity and context are not assessed here. The programme in question is called Mentoring Plus, there being a pre-programme residential course and a parallel educational and training programme, as well as the mentoring element. The different phases were staffed by a variety of in-house staff and local providers as well as the volunteer mentors.

The mentees in this programme exhibited high levels of deprivation and offending and are ‘outsiders’ on many counts. The study provides an unusually detailed profile (via a comparison with a national survey of youth lifestyles) of family disruption, education, training and work difficulties, offending behaviour, high levels of drinking, and smoking as well as illicit drug use. They came to the scheme through a variety of routes, with pathways from ‘self-referral’ and ‘word of mouth’ being considered as significant as formal referral through offending teams and schools. There was also an interview and selection process, an induction phase and pre-scheme residential course. Mentees could opt out at any of these stages. Between them, self-referral and volunteer-only membership suggest that most scheme members may have been at a ‘post-antagonism’ stage in terms of reference group affiliation. This is borne out by
some data on ‘reasons for joining the scheme’ in which ‘stopping me getting into trouble’ and ‘help me get a job’ top the poll.

The mentors’ status patterns are also described in unusual detail. They came from a variety of occupational backgrounds, though these were skewed towards the professional. Women (typically) outnumbered men two to one. The histogram of ages peaked in the 25-34 year old decile. Ethnic origin included almost half from Black African/Caribbean backgrounds (and this was considered a constructive profile for the locality of the programme). 13% had had criminal convictions. Motives for volunteering for a mentorship were many and varied, including the instrumental (enhance job prospects, unsatisfied with current job, need for challenge) and the normative/moral (to give something back, to help young people, to provide a listening ear). There is quite a spread of positions on our mentor motivation and social identity grid, though a four day training programme featured listening and non-judgmental skills and so a laissez-faire usage of their own positions may well have been encouraged.

A key research finding relates to the nature of the mentoring relationship. This can be summarised in a three-step model, described in enormous and unusual detail by the authors as follows:

- The basic cycle: contact-meeting-doing
- The problem-solving cycle: contact-meeting-doing-[firefighting]-action
- The action-oriented cycle: contact-meeting-doing-[firefighting]-action

The first stage is similar to the familiar notion of befriending or, as the authors put it, ‘the mundane stuff of basic human interaction’. Relationships then frequently face the test of a problem or crisis, and only progress on the basis of a successful response (hence ‘firefighting’). For instance, mentoring partnerships were consolidated if they managed to deal with specific and periodic episodes of violence or homelessness or substance misuse etc. When such levels of trust and mutual understanding were achieved though stages one and two, some partnerships were then able to move to the action agenda and to advance in relation to work and educational plans. The authors stress that progress though the stages is far from automatic, that crisis points intervene throughout and that the process is often cyclical, involving numerous returns to square one.

This a multi-method study and so also produces detailed quantitative evidence on impact as in the following ‘participant’ and ‘comparison’ group table:
Table 2: Main activity at beginning and end of programme

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>Beginning %</th>
<th>End %</th>
<th>% Change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending school</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending higher education</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>+19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training scheme or employment</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>+11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular truanting</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excluded from school</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in education, employment or training</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non participants</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending school</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending HE</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training scheme or employment</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular truanting</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excluded from school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in education, employment or training</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>+12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This and other data reveal a complex pattern of outcomes. The authors make two claims in particular, that the findings show:

i) programme participants display a greater overall shift from exclusion to inclusion than do non-participants

ii) evidence of impact was most marked in relation to progress in work, training and employment rather than family relationships, substance abuse and offending behaviour (data not shown)

There are attribution problems with this particular methodology. The comparison group is of young people who had initial contact but failed to participate in the (voluntary) programme. This is far from any common perception of a control group. Rather than a like-with-like comparison, voluntary self-selection could render this comparison as one between the aspirational and the antagonistic\(^\text{12}\). Be that as it may, significant gains in the direction of ‘inclusion’ are made by participants, and the research went on to investigate their own understanding of what was important.

And here lies a rather dramatic result: ‘overall the Plus element tended to be rated more favourably than the mentors’. The greater perceived utility of education and training provision here is further evidence that mentoring alone can rarely promote the full range of dispositional and positional shifts in our model. However, perhaps the most interesting fragment of evidence is on the synergy of the mentoring and the Plus elements. As can be seen from the data above, the greatest gains on the programme are made in terms of further education and, in this particular sphere, the mentors’ contribution (not shown in the data above) is rated at much the same level as the formal provision. This dual effect is illustrated in a vignette in which a mentor speaks about the confidence building that prompts and sustains the education hard slog:

\(^{12}\) Selection effects are the classic bugbear of quasi-experimentation and this self-selection effect may load the experimental group with the acquiescent and the aspirational who, according to the review theory, have better chances in the first place. Opting out of the programme might stem, alternatively, from being sufficiently in control to feel no need for it. Either way, attribution of these changes to the programme is dangerous.
She’s gained entry level one in Maths and English and we talked about level two and it was ‘no, I’m not doing that, that’s too hard’. Like at the presentation the other evening she picked up four certificates and I said to her ‘I’m really proud and are you glad you did it now?’ and she went, ‘yeah I’m glad’. And I said to her jokingly ‘well we’ll start that level two soon’ and she went ‘no’, but the next day she was on the phone, ‘I want to start level two, will you come and help me?’.

This study approaches book length and so offers much greater detail on sub-processes and multiple outcomes than most of the studies collected here. This review, therefore, is not exhaustive and further nuances, such as the limited impact on offending, are not reported here. Bulk does not make for perfection, of course, and there are the inevitable difficulties in the study on matters of attribution and the meaning of some of the outcome measures.

| 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7 | 8 | 9 |

Several important findings about long-move mentoring reside in this study. One is to emphasise that even when progress is made it is often a case of one step forwards, two steps backwards. The hypothesised linear shift from 9 to 6 to 3 to 2 to 1 might, schematically, be better rendered 9 to 6 to 9 to 6 to 3 to 2 to 3 to 1. The ‘firefighting’ needed to catch the mentee in sudden descent is another important aspect of motivational change (9 to 6 to 3) not so far noted in the model. Some mentees in this particular scheme might, by dint of its voluntary nature, have had a head start towards 6 and 3. Mentors occupy a range of status and reference group positions (1,2,4,5) thanks to their diverse motivations and occupations. However, some may be considered as having residual outsider characteristics due to spent convictions (3, 6). Mentee status gains (3 to 2 to 1) require and benefit more from supplementary formal educational and training provision, though the affective and cognitive gains may continue to be called upon to buttress the non-linear path to progress.


This is the best known study of the best known programme. It takes some of the responsibility for the popularity of mentoring programmes for youth thanks to its positive conclusion:

Taken together, the results presented here show that having a Big Brother or a Big Sister offers tangible benefits for youth. At the conclusion of the 18 month study period, we found that Little Brothers and Little Sisters were less likely to have started using drugs or taking alcohol, felt more competent about doing school work, attended school more, got better grades, and have better relationships with their parents and peers than they would have if they had not participated in the programme.

Moreover, its methodological credentials are often seen as impeccable, as the research strategy employed is as near as it is possible to get to a randomised controlled trial.
That is to say the core comparison uses 959 volunteers for the programme who are split into an experimental group and a ‘waiting list’ control. (Self-)selection effects are thus minimised and programme impact can thus be calculated directly because ‘the only systematic difference between the groups was that the treatment youths had the opportunity to be matched with a Big Brother or Big Sister’.

So who are these Little Brothers and Little Sisters? This is the staple question of this review and probably the key to explaining the success of this particular trial. Grossman and Tierney provide a useful description of mentees’ characteristics. They are rather young (mean age 12, with 80% being 13 and under). In terms of race and gender, they are 23% minority girls, 34% minority boys, 15% white girls, 23%, white boys [some missing data]. They have some of the characteristics of outsider status but this by no means applies to the majority: 43% live in a home receiving public assistance; 39% of parents are divorced or separated; 40% have a history of domestic violence; 21% have suffered emotional abuse; and 11.2% have experienced physical abuse. This is a rather mixed bag. Indubitably, we are dealing with some of America’s ‘disadvantaged’ young people but they do not possess the multiple, ingrained characteristics of the ‘dispossessed’, and crucially it is not a profile that matches participants in some of the other studies examined.

Information on reference group positions and thus motivation-on-entry has to be gleaned indirectly (the authors are concerned only to ‘control’ for this). The study, however, footnotes a clear set of entry and eligibility requirements, and some vital clues on the participants’ aspirations lie here. Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) screening involves: an assessment for a ‘minimal level of social skills’, ensuring that youths and parents actually ‘want a mentor’; gaining the ‘agreement of parent and child to follow agency rules’; the successful completion of orientation and training sessions; and the fulfilment of residential and age limitations. After the induction period matching occurred, which itself was a prolonged procedure. Matching with a mentor was achieved for 78% of the would-be mentees, with an average waiting time of 4.7 months, the shortage of suitable mentors being especially acute for minority boys, for whom the average wait was 5.9 months. In addition to these programme requirements, the research created exclusions of its own, namely for a hundred plus youths: with ‘physical and learning difficulties’ not allowing them to complete a telephone interview; those on ‘special programmes’ within the overall BBBS package; and those ‘serving a contractual obligation such as Child Protection Service contract’. This welter of self, bureaucratic and investigatory selection is, of course, significant. It is not too brave an inference to observe that the programme and the research (and indeed the control group) dealt with a relatively compliant and particularly persevering set of mentees.

We will return to the identity of the typical Little Brothers and Sisters presently, but first it is necessary to review the impact data. The report provides too much detail to be easily summarised here, but a pattern of generally positive results across a range of behaviours is exemplified in a whole succession of tables. There is fluctuation, of course. For instance, in terms of ‘antisocial behaviour’, the programme generates significant reductions in the commencement of ‘smoking’ and ‘drug’ usage, and in the levels of ‘hitting’. However, no effect is found for ‘stealing’ or ‘damage to property’. Significant impact differentials are also reported for subgroups (minority/white, male/female). Unfortunately, the sub-group analysis is only reported for the ‘face-
sheet’ race/gender classifications, and the variables more directly indicating deprivation and detachment (e.g. public assistance, domestic violence) are not used in the sub-group analysis. A potential test of the differences between those making long and short moves is thus omitted in the analysis.

Another significant and (in)famous limitation of the BBBS impact data is that much of the information on outcomes is collected by self-report via the aforementioned telephone survey. It is the programme subjects who report on the grades received, on whether they have used drugs, and so forth. In a footnote the authors quote sources, which they claim support the view that such ‘measures are acceptable by conventional social science standards’. For this reviewer, this is a questionable view, most especially in the context of programme trials, which ever since the discovery of the Hawthorne effect are well known for their capacity in influencing respondents to ‘fake good’.

In the round then, this study provides the most comprehensive basis for the claim that mentoring works to alleviate a range of problems, and improve a range of attitudes and behaviours. Doubts remain, however, on the score of the validity and reliability of some of the crucial outcome measures. Rather more important for the purposes of this theory-testing review is the subsidiary information about mentee position and the nature of the mentoring relations. Indications here point to the fact that despite some solid evidence on (status) deprivation, Little Brothers and Sisters (and their parents) are rather willing horses by reference group standards. By a steady and, perhaps, unintentional process of elimination, more damaged and antagonistic youth are removed from the programme and the inquiry. There is no basis here for a generalisable claim that youth mentoring works or that long-move mentoring is easily sustained.

And this reviewer is happy to report that no such claim is made, ‘This study does not provide evidence that any type of mentoring works, but rather that mentoring programs that facilitate the type of relationships we observed in the BBBS program work. In our judgement, the positive impacts observed are unlikely to have occurred without both the relationship with the mentor and the support the program provided the match.’ If to this list we add the qualification that BBBS only confronts a subset of disadvantaged youth, we are on our way to assessing the proper import of this study.

All of which leaves us with the important matter of the ‘infrastructure’ supporting the mentoring relationship. We have seen in previous studies how the relationship with other parties and agencies is crucial to mentoring’s success, and Grossman and Tierney’s report ends with a description of some of the unique features of BBBS.

• …volunteer screening that weeds out adults who are unlikely to keep their time commitments or who may pose a risk to youth.
• matching procedures that take into account the preferences of youth, his or her family, and the volunteer, and that use a professional case manager to analyse which volunteer would work best with each youth
• close supervision and support of each match by a case manager who makes frequent contact with the parent/guardian, volunteer, and youth and provides assistance when requested, as difficulties arise
training that includes communication and limit-setting skills, tips on relationship building and recommendations on the best way to interact with a young person.

This list arguably omits one of its key features. A glance at the history of BBBS shows that it is a ‘sturdy programme’, surviving in different forms for a whole century (Freedman, 1993). This particular inquiry is in fact only possible because it concentrated on those agencies which were popular and had sufficient capacity to create a waiting list for places. In other words, it is a study of the sturdiest bits of a sturdy programme. Given the queue for places, it is quite likely that there was some local kudos in being a ‘graduate’ from these particular schemes and, perhaps, to regard them as a passport out of social deprivation. Grossman and Tierney’s caution on matters of generalisability is thus particularly well-founded, as there is a world of difference between repute on this level and that of being referred under some contractual arrangement to a small-scale trial of an untried government scheme (c.f. study 1.5).

Even though this reappraisal of the study has questioned some of the authors’ conclusions and the general wisdom that has grown around them, the findings are not inconsistent with the overall set of hypotheses under review here. Steady gains (or at least reported ones) in family relationships and educational success, and movement out of criminality and away from minor criminal behaviour, testify that this particular group began to turn the corner (6 to 3 to 2) thanks to direction setting and aptitudinal support. Such transformations are easier for well motivated adolescents (already at 6 and 3) and there are grounds for supposing that this is the cohort being dealt with here. Mentors operating with these goals have been found to need considerable additional support, and this is evident even in the well-oiled BBBS programme.


This study provides further evidence on the inner workings of successful mentoring relationships. It is included here because it provides a quantitative analysis of some key facets of that relationship. Normally, a reviewer may expect process information to be found in qualitative studies and outcomes to be described in quantitative analyses. That division of methodological labour is not entirely watertight, however. Multivariate studies that examine a range of measured changes associated with a programme may provide some clues about the pattern and sequence of those changes and thus give an indication of how changes are triggered. The research strategy involved is similar to the previous study in that it uses the same design on a very similar sample drawn from the biggest BBBS agencies (quick-eyed readers will note overlap in the research teams). The key difference is the attempt to model the ‘pathways of change’.

As we have seen in study 1.7, before/after comparisons of the BBBS cohorts show a wide, if uneven, range of gains associated with the programme. The idea of this research is to use a method of analysis known as LISREL to arrive at a statistical...
model of the pattern of change in output and outcome measures associated with participation in the programme. This final model is reproduced in Figure 9:

**Figure 9: Path model of direct and indirect effects of mentoring**

What the model attempts to do is to show which of these intermediate changes is direct or indirect, and give a weighting to the strength of that influence. For instance, according to this model (upper portion), mentoring does not influence grades directly but only by building a youth’s perception of his or her scholastic competence, which platform then goes on to influence actual school performance. Although they show very neatly the uneven and developmental nature of the changes associated with mentoring, these models are notoriously difficult to interpret. Given this difficulty it is often wise to concentrate on some of the more general and more modest aims and claims of such models. And in this respect it is safe to endorse the broader finding of the survey, namely that ‘the effects of mentoring are partially mediated through adolescents’ perceptions of their parental relationships.’ This is actually a rather cautious and thus relatively safe inference, gained from a large sample of successful cases. It does not tell us of the actual process at work: the pattern

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13 There is no space to enter into all the technicalities of LISREL but the following limitations are often noted. The models explain relatively little of the total variance in the dependent variables, so a host of other processes, structures and mechanisms fall outside its scope. The path coefficients will change if other variables are added to the model, so the weightings above are only approximate indications of the ‘strength of influence’. The model, of course, only describes the influence of the present programme on the present subjects and is not the basis for wider generalisations about how mentoring programmes work. And, as we have seen, the BBBS organisation creates for itself a rather specific cohort of subjects. Finally, the model is dependent on the measurement ‘as conducted’. As noted, outcome measures in this set of studies were based on ‘reported’ changes. Thus the path labelled above as flowing from ‘perceived scholastic competence’ to ‘grades’ is in fact from ‘perceived scholastic competence to ‘reported grades’ (not the same thing at all and capable of bearing a quite different interpretation). Caution is thus recommended in too mechanical a reading of the pathways.
is statistical, namely that the mentees who report a variety of educational gains (they value school more, they skip less, they consider themselves to be improving) tend to be the ones who also report improved relationships at home.

And this is the inference – ‘if parents feel involved in, as opposed to supplanted by the provision of additional adult support, they are likely to reinforce mentors’ positive influences’ – that I want to add to the review. I think it is a safe inference because it buttresses earlier, qualitative findings about successful mentoring relationships extending beyond the one-to-one and insinuating themselves into other relationships and agencies. In particular, it gives support to the illustrations above about how the most able mentors can assist in hanging onto and building upon (often tenuous) family relationships (recall study 1.3). It is probably one of the unsung early components in the affective relationship, marking the beginnings of the long haul of engagement mentoring.

This study adds a very specific piece to the mentoring relationship jigsaw. What is perceived in the initial review hypotheses as a process of personal change generated in the ‘dyad’ is in fact rooted in the ‘triad’ (in this instance with other family members). The model of the initial journey from 9 to 6 and beyond needs supplementing. A beneficial mentoring relationship is not just the medium of individual change, it is also the bridge into further successful associations.


This was a significant and long awaited study of a crucial cornerstone in the BBBS programme. It is the major attempt to investigate the importance of making mentoring matches on the basis of shared racial background. Readers will note familiar names in the research team and not be surprised to hear that the study is based on a similar sample to that used in studies 1.7 and 1.8.

Although it was common practice for the BBBS initiative to employ race as one of the several factors considered in making the original match, not all partnerships were so formed, with approximately 25% consisting of cross-race matches. The ‘race-match’ rule-of-thumb, however, was significant enough so that ‘thousands of youth are retained on long waiting lists until a volunteer of the same race becomes available’. The authors report that some mentoring programmes take a ‘race-blind’ approach but these are the exceptions and the BBBS ‘light-touch’ and mentee-and-parent ‘choice’ approach to race matching is the rule (and also features, incidentally in some of the UK initiatives mentioned above).

Some hefty cultural assumptions lie at the root of this inquiry. The motives and consequences of the different matching modes are hotly disputed (Jucovy, 2002). Proponents of same-race matching argue that majority mentors cannot appreciate what it is like to be minority youth, and that they have a propensity to want to try and
‘save’ their mentees. Furthermore, not using a minority mentor will undercut minority identity and send out the wrong message that they ‘cannot look after their own’. Against this view is the notion that personal factors should outweigh demographics and that same race matches will also throw up cultural barriers pertaining, for instance, to social class. Furthermore, not using a cross-race match will help to cement racial barriers and symbolise the continuing rift between historically separated peoples.

Rhodes et al rehearse some of these positions at the beginning of their paper but then forsake the quest for the moral high ground (as does this review) and go in search of empirical evidence on the practical consequences of alternative matches. The sample for this study was drawn from the frame utilised in the aforementioned BBBS inquiries. Interest was focused on a subset of the mentees, that is to say those Little Brothers and Sisters from minority backgrounds \( (N = 476) \). Of these, 125 were placed in cross-race matches, with the remainder, following the cautious custom, being same-race. The results are presented as a series of comparisons between these two sub-groups.

First of all, other features of the composition of the two groups are monitored. There are no marked differences. The average ages of mentees finding their way into the two groups are very similar although slightly more boys (60%) than girls (56%) end up in same-race matches. Parental characteristics are also remarkably similar, with those approving of cross- and same-race matches having more or less the same proportions in receipt of public aid, in female headed households, and with high school graduation and college degrees. The mentors working in the different forms of partnership, are likewise similar on many measures, e.g. 49.6% have college degrees in the cross-race matches compared to 46.9 % in the same-race matches; the average age is 28.8 years compared to 30.03; those in professional occupations amount to 48.8% compared to 46.8%. In short, in terms of ‘input’, the prevailing matching norms and decisions do not seem to produce two distinct constituencies of participants.

But what of output? Are cross-race matches more successful than same-race partnerships, or vice-versa? The team’s answer is once again neutral – and decisively so. The two groups are compared in terms of changes in a whole range of reported attitudes and behaviours: value of school, perceived scholastic competence, grades, skipping classes, hours of homework, peer intimacy, peer conflict, peer prosocial behaviour, peer self-esteem, peer inequality, parental relations, self-worth, hit someone, frequency of alcohol use, frequency of drug use etc. On only one factor, the ‘likelihood of reporting initiation of alcohol’ was there a difference (more frequent in the same race matches). Rhodes et al find no particular reason to go in search of an interpretation for this one statistically significant relationship. It is certainly hard to figure out a reason why there could be a cultural difference peculiar to acknowledging alcohol use and it may simply be an artefact of a complex research design (see below). The key finding is the overall null result, one of those occasions when no news is big news.\(^{14}\)

\(^{14}\) Some further differences are detected at the sub-sub-group level, e.g. minority boys in cross-race matches reported lower levels of perceived scholastic competence than did minority boys in same-race matches, with the opposite for girls. These differences are very difficult to interpret and are considered ‘patternless’ by the authors (and justifiably so in this reviewer’s opinion).
This study faces the same methodological difficulties as its predecessors (reported rather than behavioural measures, heavy subject pre-selection etc.). Additionally in this inquiry, the race-matching element occurs as part of programme routine and so the comparisons above are not between randomly assigned groups. This means that factors apart from those monitored could still differentiate the groups (e.g. case managers might place, say, more troubled youth or more experienced mentors in one type of dyad). But whatever they are, and indeed if there are such practices, they do not appear to imbalance the outcomes for the two forms of partnership.

From the point of view of the review hypotheses, this is an important result. The basis of our developing model is that the participant’s status will make a difference to the efficacy of a mentoring initiative. And, of course, a basic status difference is maintained in all the studies reviewed thus far: namely, mentors are adults and mentees are adolescents. This initial contrast tends to load the partnerships with a range of subsidiary status differences in terms of education, work, networks, interests etc. And, as we have seen, these distinguishing features are important, most certainly if the mentee is burdened with multiple forms of disadvantage. This study, however, begins to rule out the significance of some of the ‘ascribed’ or ‘residual’ aspects of status. Race, if only in terms of the crude demographics of matching, does not seem to make a difference to mentoring’s intermediate or long term outcomes.

This result, by the way, does not render pointless the race-matching rule of thumb. It says only that this initial choice has no sustained, mid-to-long term implications. However, the utility of the race-matching norm may boil down to the fact that step one (befriending) has a small head start in conditions of outward familiarity. It is getting beyond befriending that is the bane of youth mentoring.

The familiar broad patterns of mentor (1,2,3,4) and mentee (3,6,9) stations are observed in this study. It does, however, allow us to assess the utility of mentoring when the partners share one clear facet of minority (or outsider) status. Matching on the characteristic of race seems to make little difference to the efficacy of the partnership. It is worth re-emphasising that this result is a statement about the nature of the relationship. No inference should be drawn across to individuals; otherwise the famous error of the ‘ecological fallacy’ is committed. Race may be terribly important at the individual level. Minority youth will often be piled high with other status disadvantages and be beyond the reach of mentoring.
Effectiveness of mentoring programmes for youth: a meta-analytic review
*American Journal of Community Psychology* 30(2) pp157-197

This is a long, highly technical ‘meta-analysis’, pooling together the results of 55 experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations of mentoring programmes in the USA. The review draws on literature from 1970-1998 and aims to assess the overall effects of mentoring programmes on youth as well as investigating impact variation in relation to key aspects of programme design and implementation.

There is evidence that mentoring programmes are effective, but impact is declared ‘relatively small’ or ‘modest’. This result is estimated via several forms of the weighted and unweighted *d*-index, but in a more digestible form is rendered thus: ‘the outcome for the average participant in a youth mentoring programme surpassed that of approximately 55% of the control group’. This indubitably tame influence is of no special interest to our explanatory analysis, but not at all inconsistent with it. DuBois et al’s net impact measure hoovers up and pools together data on a wide diversity of programme goals, operationalised in 44 different ways. As such, the overall verdict melds together all manner of victories and defeats, and the analysis to date has taught us to expect mixed success with different programme objectives, under different contextual conditions, and on the back of different mentoring mechanisms. Indeed, it is fairly common in interventions with multiple ambitions and carried out on broad populations for the net effect ‘to crawl asymptotically towards zero’ (Rossi, public lecture, quoted in Shadish et al 1991, p386).

The so-called ‘moderator’ and ‘mediator’ analysis provides more analytic purchase in that it tries to provide statistical estimates of some of the characteristics of those programmes and personnel associated with the more positive effects. These contributory factors include many outside the scope of this analysis (such as the training of mentors and the management of the programme etc.) but two are of special interest from the perspective of understanding partners and partnerships.

I. The strongest empirical basis exists for utilising mentoring as a preventative intervention for youth whose backgrounds include significant conditions of environmental risk and disadvantage.

There is a suggestion here, much welcomed incidentally by the mentoring fraternity, that mentoring works best for ‘high-risk’ youth. But the statement needs careful unpacking, especially for the present review, in that it seems to run counter to some of the previous evidence showing the difficulty of ‘long-move’ mentoring. In terms of ‘destination’, the outcome measures for the youth in question include training and academic gains, so some initial, positive shift across the status dimension is

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15 As such it may appear a strange choice for inclusion in this theory driven review. The purpose is two-fold. The first is to add to the technical range of studies being swallowed up by the present method. Explanatory reviews try to make sense of data patterns, be they found in primary studies (of any methodological stripe) or in secondary analysis. The second rationale is to demonstrate the idea of explanatory refinement. Because it operates at high levels of aggregation, DuBois et al’s review throws up results that seem somewhat out of kilter with previous analyses. Can they be synthesised into an explanatory whole? In some cases, as will be seen in the text that follows, this involves the reviewer in re-interpreting or even discounting claims in the original research.
demonstrated in DuBois et al’s analysis. The crucial question is about ‘origin’: in what sense are these high-risk subjects?

There is one sense, of course, in which all subjects in programmes such as BBBS are high risk in that programme publicity, referral and screening are usually directed at those with needs for the additional support that mentoring may bring. Within this group, DuBois et al distinguish between those suffering ‘environmental’ and ‘individual’ risk, with the meta-analysis revealing only the former reaping the enhanced gains. Operational definitions, alas, are not provided in the journal report but convention suggests that the environmental risk might be measured in terms of social location within deprived groups as measured by poverty, race, welfare support, home and parental circumstances etc. Individual risk is often located via a record of behavioural disruption, substance abuse, criminal activity, and being a victim of abuse (perhaps more like the participants in study 1.5).

This difference in progress suggests that the oppositional activities of the ‘environmental risk only’ sub-group are not so well entrenched and so, in the reference group terms under scrutiny here, they may well be acquiescent with their lot or even aspire to change. A significant point in favour of the latter interpretation stems from the screening and admission procedures to many of the schemes incorporated in the review. Several authors have criticised the evaluations of BBBS interventions for not acknowledging sufficiently the ‘filtering out’ of unmotivated families and young people (Lucas and Liabo, 2003). As noted previously, there is a screening element involving in some cases written elements, referral is controlled, and there is often a lengthy waiting list to start the programme given the perpetual problems of finding and training suitable mentors. In these circumstances it seems reasonable to assume that this sub-group of relative successes may often be materially deprived but are also a forbearing lot who may well belong to the ‘aspirational outsiders’ category of the review matrix.

II. …whether mentoring was provided alone or as part of a multi-component programme was not a significant moderator of effect size. Similarly, neither the comparison of BB/BSA versus non-BB/BSA programs nor the comparison of programs according to psychosocial or instrumental goals yielded significantly different effect sizes.

These null results are, perhaps, surprising and run counter to some of the earlier findings. They are surprising in that they seem to suggest that however a youth mentoring programme is packaged, it will have broadly similar and very modest impacts. This does not square with the previous findings of this review that:

i) the ‘plus’ element of a programme (study 1.6) or location in ‘housing’ or ‘education’ initiatives may be the vital contexts for success (study 1.3)

ii) mentoring has a base in mundane activities and, in many instances, fares better in the affective domain than in the positional (studies 1.2, 1.4, 1.5)

16 It is appropriate here to issue the reminder that the overall measures of academic gains include original studies that use ‘perceived scholastic gains’ as the benchmark. Note has already been made of the unreliability of self-report in evaluation exercises.

17 Yet another interpretation of the relative success of the ‘environmentally’ deprived might be a ‘floor effect’. Materially better off youngsters may have less room for improvement.
Reviews face such puzzles and contractions all the time and it is important in an explanatory synthesis to be able to account for the discrepancies. In this case, there is a methodological explanation and it is likely that the high levels of aggregation in meta-analysis account for the inconsistency. The 55 different ‘trials’ are compared in terms of effect sizes and it will be recalled that the raw data that DuBois et al use in coming to this calculation are based on different permutations of the 44 outcome indicators used in the primary studies. Variations in programme effect are then accounted for in the moderator analysis which itself takes into consideration 49 variables describing the myriad characteristics of the programmes. Each of these moderators takes a single and simple cut at the variable of interest. For instance, in the case of programme make up, each trial is categorised as ‘mentoring alone’ or ‘multi-component’. The result is that when it comes to making an assessment of the importance of programme configuration, the meta-analysis is making a blunt (crudely drawn) comparison assessed in terms of a blunt (composite) measure.

Earlier case studies have shown that multi-component programmes take on a variety of forms. In study 1.2, mentors acted as an adjunct (and seemingly in opposition) to a training programme. In study 1.3, mentoring was carried out as an extension of professional youth work. In study 1.6, mentoring was carried out in parallel with education and training programmes. It seems that one of the keys to youth mentoring lies in the ability to dovetail the components of the long move, and DuBois’s aggregate data cannot make the subtle discernment to assist in such an analysis.

A similar question may be raised in relation to the apparent non-significance on impact of whether the programme was ‘psycho-social’, ‘instrumental’ or ‘both’. Details are not given about how such a classification was operationalised. But again, this is a very tough measurement call; mentoring relationships develop and blow with the wind and this key function might be better judged at the level of individual partnerships rather than a public statement about programme ethos. Again, one suspects that the impact of these different mentoring styles is better picked up by a locally sensitive measure rather than a crude threefold distinction. So, on balance and against this piece of evidence, this review sticks with the proposition that gains from mentoring are more easily made in the affective than the material domains.

There are many other potentially interesting moderating effects uncovered in the analysis, but a straightforward interpretation often remains elusive because of the high levels of aggregation of the studies and low powers of discernment of the variables. One recommendation of the authors is that the use of ‘mentors with a background in a helping role or profession’ (e.g. teacher) tends to be associated with positive results. Note that this positive mediator seems to suggest, in contrast to the previous result, that mentors capable of providing ‘instrumental assistance’ may have more clout than those trading on emotional loyalties. Like much of the rest of the meta-analysis, this remains an interesting possibility but one which it would be unwise for decision makers to follow ‘carte blanche’.
This study confirms the overall difficulties of long haul mentoring, showing that some, but relatively few, young people enrolled on the major US programmes make significant (reported) status gains. Youth who are ‘at risk’ by dint of material deprivation, but who may well be aspirational youth (at 3) either by inclination or by dint of screening and persistence, have the best chance of making status gains towards 2 and 1. Certain other conclusions of the analysis are questionable or ambiguous and add little to the emerging understanding of mentoring pathways.

Section I, Block 1 summary: mentoring relationships for youth reintegration

It is high time to draw together the analysis of this first excursion into studies of youth mentoring. The synthesis is expressed as a model of ‘pathways of youth mentoring’ as in Figure 10 (see p43). Before explaining the highways and byways of the model, it is appropriate to issue a reminder about its overall form. As previously explained here and elsewhere, the synthesis does not seek to pass a verdict on whether youth mentoring works (or fails) but tries to explain how it works (and runs into difficulties). In and of itself, this explanatory remit is impossibly broad, for there is an infinite number of ways in which mentoring is conducted and an endless array of ambitions for its outcomes. The synthesis is thus focused and theory-driven in highlighting the particular role played by the basic orientation of the mentor and mentee, and the nature of their relationship. Quite diverse research studies have been brought into the analysis by concentrating on this particular theoretical thread and by pulling out the empirical evidence that relates to some simple hypotheses about different mentoring relationships and for whom and in which circumstances they function (Box 1, p13).

The ‘findings’ of the review are thus expressed, quite deliberately, in the form of a model (Figure 10). It takes the form of a diagram of the pathways that youth mentoring has to take if it is to execute its most daunting ambition of engaging with disaffected youth and reintegrating them into the mainstream world of education and work. The balance of evidence is that this ultimate goal is met infrequently and only in the special circumstances described in the model. The model itself is expressed as a network of flows, blockages and slippages. The metaphor of snakes-and-ladders comes to mind in representing the ups and downs of a mentee’s progress, but we shall continue in more prosaic fashion, with four concluding bullet points:

- Starting at the bottom left of the diagram, the model indicates that in order to fulfil the overall ambition of ‘engagement’ a mentor must accomplish a whole set of functions, summarised and simplified as ‘befriending’, ‘direction setting’, ‘coaching’ and ‘advocacy’. Progress up this ladder gets more difficult (arrows decline in volume) and many relationships get no further than a close bonding based on the sharing of mundane activities. There are positive exceptions, of course. In particular, ascent from emotional and cognitive gains and into skill and career progression is more likely for those mentees who arrive in a programme with aspirations about moving away from their present status and its antagonistic norms.

- Turning to the second column, one sees that mentee progress is not only halting, it is non-linear. That is to say, given the circles in which they move, many disadvantaged young people have frequent and repetitive battles with authorities,
bust-ups with family, and brushes with the law. In such circumstances (the lightning symbol) mentoring relationships will tend to collapse along with everything else. Accordingly, the best attuned portrayals of the mentoring relationship discovered in the review include and emphasise a ‘firefighting’ element. This rebuilding of mentoring functions also follows a stepladder of ascent in which relations of trust have to be regained, mentees imbued with resilience to old and repeated stumbling blocks, and instilled with confidence in the face of new hurdles.

- Turning to the third column, this indicates that the mentor’s relationship is not just with the mentee. Mentors have to bring Mohammed to the mountain, but also vice versa. In respect of each mentoring function there exists a ‘reception committee’ of other agents and agencies, and that function is better accomplished if the mentor makes steps to bring along members of that committee. Thus befriending and trust-building work better and, to some extent, through the development of support to, and exchange with, the family and close friends of the mentee. In moving up the ladder, the mentor will parley with other members of the mentee’s community and, after that, all manner of welfare, training and career guidance professionals. Bridge-building to other agents and agencies is shown to be a key facet of success. Clearly, different mentors will have quite different access to and experience of these different networks. In ransacking the accounts of mentoring relationships for this review, it is rare indeed to find evidence that any single mentor can encompass them all.

- This leads us to column three and the finding that mentoring works better if it is embedded in a programme offering further support, especially in terms of some of the loftier training and career aspirations of mentoring programmes. But once again, there is no given and guaranteed formula of ‘mentoring plus’. Some studies show that relationships with other agencies can be marked by a lack of co-ordination or insufficient resources, or even mistrust and hostility. Accordingly, lightning can strike here too, and this may involve the mentor in a rather different round of firefighting with a rather different group of incendiaries (illustrated in column four). Here the literature describes another of the mentor’s supplementary tasks, namely placating the various authorities of which his or her protégé may have fallen foul. Needless to say, relatively few mentors will have the equipment or stomach for this battle and these interfaces mark another set of potential cul-de-sacs for the mentoring journey.

Figure 10 and the four-paragraph summary above represent the conclusion to this part of the review. The conclusion does not tell the policy maker whether to buy-in or opt-out of youth mentoring programmes (it is assumed that this decision gets made on other grounds). However, it does try to encapsulate what has been learned about why such mentoring programmes work and why they fail. The conclusion is deliberately offered in the form of a model, in the belief that policy makers think in model-building terms when they plan and develop programmes. They aspire to change. They know that change inches along. They know that a variety of pulls, pushes and supports is needed to sustain an intervention. Accordingly, Figure 10 is a sketch map of the pathways along which mentoring flies or flounders, all of which need to be anticipated in the management of a programme. It offers a blueprint of the
mechanisms that need to be embedded in the construction of a programme, in the selection and training of practitioners, and in the targeting and motivation of subjects.

Throughout the review I have been resistant to the idea that the task was one of offering a verdict on youth mentoring. The ritual of the ‘finale’, however, cannot be avoided. It is appropriate, therefore, to leave the last word to one of the papers reviewed here (study 1.3, p20):

It is clear that planned mentoring is not a ‘magic bullet’ that is capable of solving all the problems facing young people and those charged with working with them. Structural constraints continue to exert a powerful influence on the trajectories of such vulnerable young people: the influence of poverty, early childhood difficulties and inequalities of health… Such issues cannot be offset solely by good relationships with adults or anyone else. The development of a mentoring relationship, however, may enhance the capacity to reflect on these issues and to better be able to negotiate services and support in certain circumstances.’ (Philip et al, 2004, p49)
Figure 10: Pathways of youth mentoring

Diminishing Mentor Efficacy  Firefighting I  Supplementary Resources  Firefighting II

Advocacy

Coaching

Direction Setting

Befriending

Confidence Building

Resilience Building

Trust Building

Work & Career

Education & Training

Youth & Community

Family & Peers

Honest-broking

Trouble-shooting

Fence-mending

Peace-making
Section II: What Makes a Good Match?

The following studies are analysed in respect of what they tell us about the optimal match between mentors and mentees. Mentoring is a partnership, but what qualities must the partners bring to make the relationship work? Are the best pairings made on the basis of similarities or differences and, more specifically, which parallels and which divergences have the most impact? Also under investigation is the objective of mentoring and support. Are partnerships that deliver well on one mentoring role/task as effective on others?

The received wisdom on such pairings includes the ideas that recognising a match is a matter for tacit knowledge (one only knows it when it has happened), and that bonding is somewhat ethereal (it happens at that moment when the invisible spark flies). Whilst we may never reach the point of predictability, the following studies suggest that there is a more palpable and robust pattern to successful and unsuccessful matches. Not all of the potential contributory factors are analysed here: pairings are analysed only in terms of the principal explanatory concepts of the review, namely what can be discerned about status and reference group affiliation. In order to test for the variations in these factors, cases are chosen in which mentoring is confronted with a wide range of objectives and carried out in a broad range of social and policy contexts. The studies that follow thus cover programmes aimed at peer education on drug abuse, AIDS awareness, corporate advancement, self-help in chronic illness and so on. The methodological idea is that the underlying patterns are most likely to emerge if one examines a variety of possible permutations of mentor and mentee locations. Expanding the review beyond the confines of youth mentoring and into support groups of all complexions shifts us from facing a boat-load of primary studies to an array that is truly titanic. Coverage of studies is limited and selective, and this section of the review should be understood as having a more exploratory role.

Prior to broadening the analytic coverage, it is appropriate to reprise the long-move, youth mentoring studies with respect to these subtly different questions about mentoring matches (Box 1, p13, hypotheses 3 to 8).

Block 1: Reprise of long move studies

As a summary, one can chart the typical locations of mentors and mentees in youth mentoring on the grid in Figure 5 (p8), which is restyled as Figure 11 below. Mentees tend to be located in cells 9, 6 and 3 (‘tiled’ box). They are outsiders in status terms, usually multiply so. But in terms of reference group, there is much variation by dint of self, programme and research selection. Mentors’ characteristics are less well described in the literature, but with some latitude for the ‘sociological imagination’, they may be placed in a box (diagonal stripe) with spread around cells 5, 2, 4, and 1. Simply because they are adults and have some formal (and usually vetted) place in an official scheme, they cannot be considered outsiders. However, they are only rarely

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18 In methodological terms this is known as ‘contrastive’ sampling or ‘most-different’ designs.
19 Realist synthesis is theory refinement. It begins with theory and ends with theory, the latter, hopefully, being more powerful. This strategy allows for reviews which a) add further precision to narrowly-defined programme theories; or b) are exploratory studies mapping choices between broad policy alternatives. You are now entering zone b.
20 This is allowable in realist synthesis! The phrase belongs to C Wright Mills (1959)
mainstream authority figures with professional responsibility for their mentees, so – with exceptions – they might be placed in the ‘marginal’ category. In terms of their identity and motivations as mentors, we have seen that many employ a rather laissez-faire approach to their task (recall the befrienders’ words in study 1.3). Thus the centre of gravity of the mentors box is placed in cell 5, though we have also seen ‘professional friends’ in cells 1 and 3 (in the same study) and some volunteer proselytisers in cell 2 (in, for example, study 1.1).

**Figure 11: Key status and identity positions in ‘classic youth mentoring’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor Social Identity (motivation)</th>
<th>Insider (full member)</th>
<th>Marginal (provisional member)</th>
<th>Outsider (non-member)</th>
<th>Mentee Social Identity (motivation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>advocate (proselytiser)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>aspirational (candidature)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>autonomous (laissez faire)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>acquiescence (resilience)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antipathy (obstructionist)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>antagonism (resistance)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So how does this inform our hypotheses about the respective status positions and motivational characteristics of mentor and mentee? What is the nature of the match in youth mentoring? Figure 11 also depicts what we might have learned about the ‘ideal’ trajectory of youth re-engagement. The right-angled, multi-headed arrow represents the hesitant progress up from antagonism to engagement and across in terms of qualifications and livelihood. The dashed arrow, appropriately, represents the more limited affective gains with which most partnerships end. But concentrating here on what we have learned about the more successful relationships, what can be said about the composition of the dyad?

**Relationships in youth mentoring**

- The simplest theory of the optimal mentoring match (the human bridge theory) says that the mentor should ‘reside’ in the cell into which the mentee moves. However, in the step-by-step pathway that typifies youth mentoring, the mentor would need to be a social contortionist to perform according to this hypothesis. And, as a rule, such acrobatics are rarely seen. The mentor is not a fellow outsider who coaxes the embittered to chill-out and join him/her in acquiescence, before transforming into someone ready to leave the streets who beguiles the mentee to follow still further up the ladder. Even less does he or she metamorphise into semi-respectability, beckon the mentee onwards, and then trampoline yet higher in order to reach out bountifully from the establishment.
During the year or so of a successful relationship the mentor is, more typically, a mid-field player trying and often struggling to fulfil all these roles. As we have seen, mentors often perform more strongly in some of these positions than others. They are rarely complete counterparts and never exact contemporaries of their young mentees. However, initial befriending does seem to be anchored in a partial but immediate sharing of identity. What has been gleaned about same-race matching seems to suggest that it plays a role in creating an immediate comfort zone rather than in propelling long range progress. In the same way the intuitive matches around locality, gender, mutual interests are probably important in getting to first base but don’t make for the home run. Neither, it must be said, is there a ha’porth of evidence for a match-of-opposites theory, with the mentor being a distant, exemplary role model in pursuit of whom the mentee moves mountains. Whilst, as noted, a professional background can be useful in guiding training and job search, the mentor usually has to call on additional support via welfare and educational agencies to inspire and cajole the mentee towards a shift in status.

So is this mid-cell, margin-dwelling, laissez-faire character our optimal youth mentor? The literature does suggest the utility of the all-rounder, perhaps not surprisingly given that engagement mentoring is a decathlon and not a sprint. But, indubitably, there is more to mentorship than this. There are further copious clues on the matter scattered through the literature previously reviewed, on the theme of ‘been there, done that’. That is to say, many of the accounts reveal that mentors, too, often suffered a disruptive youth. Recall, for instance, the mentor in study 1.3 disclosing a ‘tearaway’ background; recall from study 1.6 that 13% of the Mentoring Plus mentors had a past criminal conviction (and await news from study 2.3). Accordingly, this synthesis draws the conclusion that the basic formula of matching may never be discovered entirely within the balance of present characteristics, but can probably be traced more significantly in the details of experience, biography and life history.

The basic repertoire of youth mentoring, and a notion of the ideal match, is thus captured in the following vignette from study 1.3 (p20): ‘I try and make them feel normal and they will come out with things like oh this happened to me and that happened and I will say well this happened to me. And it’s I’ve done this and I’ve done that [too] and it gives them a sense that they are not on their own. Other people have been through what they have been through, and it makes them feel a bit better because they know other people have been through it. And they are not on their own, they have people that care about them and who want to have them in here and want to be in their company. And they get encouraged to do things.’ (Philip et al, 2004, p39)

Block 2: Peer support programmes

Section II now moves in a different direction. ‘Youth’ remain the focus of the next set of interventions reviewed, but under a alternative form of support. This sequence of five studies examines ‘peer support programmes’, whose underlying logic is often captured by statements like: ‘the grapevine already exists, so let’s make positive use of it’; or ‘let’s get hold of the hard-to-reach by using those already there’. In such interventions, the protagonists have a quite different balance of status and reference
group characteristics. The methodological rationale is to refine our understanding of support relationships by focusing on cases in which the partners are closely identified – ‘peers’ no less. Whilst there is such a thing as one-to-one ‘peer mentoring’, peer support also covers alignments in which peers meet as groups, as well as those in which such gatherings occur in the context of professional supervision. The group dynamics of these various configurations are not up for examination here: the cases are ransacked only for information on the strengths and weaknesses of a close mentor and protégé (leader and member) match.


Mellanby et al’s report is a comparison of a school-based, multi-session sex education programme called A PAUSE, as delivered by ‘peers’ (slightly older students) and by adults (teachers, healthcare workers). It thus furnishes a well aimed test of the efficacy of different partnerships. The headline result is that ‘peer leaders appear to be more effective in establishing conservative norms and attitudes related to sexual behaviour than adults [but]… were less effective in imparting factual information and getting student involved in class room activities’.

This statement itself compresses a welter of findings, some of which can be elaborated upon here. Of students who received the adult-led programme, 30% reported ‘joining in a lot’ compared to 20% who received the peer-led programme. The adult-led groups gave significantly higher levels of correct answers to questions on pregnancy as it related to periods, condom effectiveness and first-time sex. The peer-led group, however, showed greater knowledge of the prevalence of sexual intercourse for 16-year-olds (namely that most teenagers had not had sex by this age). And in terms of norms, 32% of students in the peer-led group thought that physical relationships for someone of their age should stop at a ‘minimal level’ (smiles, holding hands, hugs and kisses) as opposed to almost 19% of the adult-led group.

Mellanby and colleagues concentrate on bald findings such as these and, in particular, on the mechanics and measures of the before-and-after comparisons. The study offers little more than hints of explanation for such differences, and reports stoutly: ‘the study has not investigated why peers might be more influential in changing attitudes’. But can the model under development in this review model explain this outcome pattern?²¹

In terms of status difference the subjects of the study are in the main ‘outsiders’ or, at a pinch, ‘marginals’ – but, note, that such a classification is made in relation to programme objectives and not on the basis of a generalised view of youth. That is to say, these outsiders are sexually inexperienced young people. The objective of the programme (A PAUSE) appears to be twofold, namely:

²¹ Most proponents of systematic review would have apoplexy at this suggestion. According to the orthodoxy, the reviewer’s task is to appraise studies and then report faithfully upon and pool the findings of the good ones. For realist synthesis, the task is to build an explanatory model, and going beyond reported findings and into their interpretation is the whole point. This exploration may go so far as developing, clarifying and perhaps even challenging the original analysis.
i) to keep them in this category for a while longer

ii) to warn them of some of the consequences and dangers (pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease) of too reckless a leap into bed and thus into a different ‘outsider’ category, namely those involved in promiscuous, unprotected sex

The first of these messages seems delivered more successfully by novitiate youth peers rather than by experienced adults. So those ‘attracted to’ or ‘mulling over’ sexual activity seem more likely to be held in check by those who are ‘not yet interested’ or ‘don’t think it’s appropriate for them’. Outsiders (in cells 6 and 9) who are indifferent to, or resist, the onward march of sex are better placed to calm the aspirations of candidates (cell 3). However, the second message about the potential downside and dangers of full sexual activity seems better pursued in its elementary first steps by those with expert, ‘insider’ status (1).

The first aim is thus about norms and values, and a working hypothesis is that these are best imparted and consolidated a) by someone of a similar status, and b) by means of cognitive and affective resources. Young people with some hesitation about and indifference to the cry that ‘everyone is doing it’, and finding themselves in a majority within the programme, and backed by some information about actual levels of teen sexual activity, may well be much better positioned to exert such a moral influence.

By contrast, according to a theory already well established in this review, those with insider status (adults in this instance) are generally better at coaching and advocacy. And the former of these skills appears to come to the fore in organising the intervention and imparting some knowledge of the adverse consequences of sexual intercourse.

This inquiry thus appears consonant with the core review theory and, as a first look at peer-to-peer advice, it might seem to imply that values-based mentoring is best carried out by individuals of equivalent status. This result is hardly the basis of an unqualified generalisation on peer prowess, however, for what is also true of these particular findings is that:
• the views of peer leaders seem to be in the majority, and
• they are particularly consonant with the programme message, and
• the programme message is about not changing behaviour and indeed resisting any change.

This latter goal of inertia or steadfastness is not a universal aim of mentoring or peer support and there is a need to investigate whether peer action chimes as well with a range of other programme objectives.

There appear to be two different programme objectives here. The philosophy of A PAUSE is that it is OK not to dash into sexual relationships (don’t move too quickly from 3 to 2 to 1). This is a message aimed at 3s and 6s (the ‘curious about’ and those ‘mulling over’ sexual activity) and is apparently transmitted best by those who are at 6 and 9 (‘not yet interested’ and ‘don’t think it’s appropriate for them’). Such a message may be less plausible if uttered by 1s, 2s, 3s,
4s, 5s, and 6s who are all having sex (if with varying motivations and appetite). The ‘beware-the-dangers’ part of the programme (knowledge/aptitudinal resources), however, seems better pursued in its elementary first steps by those with expert, thus ‘insider’, status (1).


This is primarily a ‘theory piece’, and somewhat critical of the ‘almost religious tenor surrounding peer education’. It contains reference to several empirical studies, including some qualitative work of the author on HIV/AIDS prevention programmes, and this is the evidence fragment to be picked upon here22. It allows us to pursue further the hypothesis developed in the previous study, namely that those of the same status are best placed to influence values and direction setting. Frankham points to a potential contradiction in that simple proposition as follows. With one voice peer-led interventions entreat, ‘submit to peer influence in what peer educators have to say’. And with another they implore ‘resist peer influence (or pressure as it is usually configured) in other areas of your life’. In short, one lot of peers is charged with undoing the sway of another bunch.

Frankham’s empirical evidence demonstrates that the tug of war does not always haul in the intended manner. Her study focused on an intervention in which peer educators were given four days training on HIV/AIDS prevention, and then discussed the material with their peers in seminars in lesson time. In particular, she examined the motives for the ‘particular constituency’ of young people who volunteered to become peer leaders. Frankham notes that they were highly motivated to learn ‘for themselves about the syndrome and its consequences’ on the grounds of ‘personal safety’. But she argues that their participation as peer mentors was also for reasons quite extraneous to the project’s aims. Most were ‘academic high-flyers’ on their way to university. Moreover, argues Frankham, the programme managers encouraged this chance to development ‘leadership qualities’. This particular concoction of direction-setters was not always to the taste of other members of the group. As one participant put it ‘they’re a bunch of wimps, why should I follow them?’ The peer leaders themselves felt that the scheme fell short of their expectations, and requested extra training in ‘control’ and ‘clarifying information’.

Frankham’s study is of limited value to the review in that it gives no indication of the overall balance of influences, and no measure of which of them held sway in this particular instance. But it does provide a useful warning that the internal dynamics of peer mentoring can build up resistance to the programme message. It might be that same-status leaders/mentors by dint of their formal organisational position are higher-status in terms of education and ambition, and this reduces their ability to provide influence in the cognitive and emotional domain.

The crucial difference with the previous case study relates to the objectives of the programme. In this case, peer leaders are charged with forewarning and forearming

22 ‘Thought’ and ‘theory’ pieces are another source that would be unlikely to sit before the jury in the standard systematic review. This study is included here because its conceptual framework provides a useful amendment to the theory under review. That conceptual framework is supported empirically in Frankham’s analysis’ although in the form of a secondary account of previous research. To track it fully requires the ‘chain referral’ searching that is common in realist synthesis.
their fellows about the dangers of a world they, collectively, have not yet fully entered. The programme message is not about inertia but mobility. It is not about refraining from sex but making it safe. Whilst it is but a pinprick of evidence on its own, the ‘bunch of wimps’ remark provides a clue that outsider experience is no basis on which to preach insider messages about responsibility in sexual conduct. Indeed, the narrow qualifications for insider status that academic prowess might bring could be precisely the wrong platform to influence those with broader tastes for life’s adventures, and who are closer to the margins of regular sexual contact. What is more, the peer leaders’ call for ‘more training’ might indicate a difficulty in performing a role they perceive as calling for insider expertise.

Peer leaders advocate safer sex practices as outsiders by dint of not being part of the school/health education mainstream. This programme theory is about 3s, rather than teachers at 1, being best placed to influence fellow outsiders at 6 and 9 in matters of a rather private and personal nature. However, these particular leaders are also proto-insiders (1) or proto-marginals (2) by dint of education position and ambition. This leaves them without the expert authority of real 1s or, perhaps, the street (or should that be bedroom) credibility gained by some of their peers at 6 and 9.


This study adopted a ‘peer education approach to drug education’, and one of its crucial aspects is a consideration of the role that ex-drug users might play in the process. The intervention (YAP) provided information, advice and counselling to young people but at its heart was a ‘workshop’ programme led by young people, many of whom had experience of drugs. The key objectives of the workshops were ‘drug information’ and ‘harm reduction’, rather than the ‘just say no’ approach which was considered inappropriate for this community in which drug usage was on the point of ‘normalisation’. At the heart of the evaluation lies the notion of credibility: what was it about the message and the messengers that the participants found compelling?

The report distinguishes three types of credibility:
- **Person-based credibility**: arising from personal characteristics such as age, sex, ethnic group etc.
- **Experience-based credibility**: arising from the educator’s experience of drug misuse, contact with the criminal justice system, or bereavement
- **Message based credibility**: arising from what the educator is saying and the way it is said

The authors report that the latter two proved more significant in this particular project, and that the classic peer support idea of person-to-person matching was not the
important lever. ‘There was a general feeling…that people of the same age had broadly the same level of experience and knowledge, and that there was little point in listening to people of the same age as them. Whilst they tended to support using young people as educators, they did so with the proviso that the educators should be somewhat older that the audience.’

Respondents indicated that people who would not, because of their age, normally be considered as credible may be viewed as such if they are thought of as having the relevant experience. A YAP worker was viewed as credible because, despite being in his thirties, he had used drugs. Similarly, some respondents felt their parents might have misused drugs in the past and so indicated a readiness to listen to them...

…Although crucial to establishing credibility, drug use was not regarded as the only valid source of explanation. Formal study was seen by some respondents as a legitimate way of finding out about drugs, and it was clear that membership of a professional drug agency conferred expert status on the YAP volunteers. Respondents who had not used drugs, however, placed much more emphasis on these sources of credibility than did those who had used drugs. The drug users in the study tended to treat as credible people who had used drugs.

The study and the conclusions above are based almost entirely on qualitative evidence, and the data are produced entirely in the form of extensive and seemingly well-reported testimony: ‘It’s better to be hearing all this from people who’d used drugs, people with glasses talking scientific words is no good.’ Without a quantitative picture it is impossible to tell whether ‘experience’ and ‘message’ rather than ‘person’ is a general rule for credibility. Furthermore, it may not be the typical pattern and may only follow in cases in which the anti-social (out-group) behaviour in question is well established among the programme participants. The paper is not quite consistent on this important consideration. The view is given that drug use in the area was widespread, indeed ‘normalised’) but that this is said to be an ‘impression’ held by the youngsters interviewed. Actual drug usage was only disclosed by a quarter of the respondents.

This initiative, probably quite typically, has a fair admixture of leaders and subjects and relationships. Programme subjects are ‘outsiders’ by dint of being youth, from a poor area and on the fringes of drug usage. Programme leaders are, in various permutations, ‘insiders’ by dint of expertise and profession, ‘marginals’ in terms of movement away from drugs, and ‘outsiders, in respect of their peer similarities. The fruitful combinations seem to be as follows. Young people who are already users and not likely to quit (9) are most influenced to harm reduction (6) by former users who were once (9 and 6) but have now moved across and operate from a marginal, laissez-faire position (5). These same young people (9) are not influenced by peers at (3), with whom they share only demographics, or by experts at (1) who use ‘scientific words and wear glasses’. However, non-drug taking subjects at (3) are influenced by knowledge directed from and authenticated by insider status (1). These patterns have some affinity with
the basic model, although the influence of former rather than present positions again seems to be the key, and therefore more redolent of a pattern discovered about youth mentoring than in the other peer support studies.


This example is taken from the evaluation of a peer education programme used as an HIV-prevention strategy in South Africa. Essentially, it is a tale of frustration about how a particular model of peer education failed to gel when applied in a new context. The programme theory starts with the familiar idea that young people establish norms about sexual conduct in a process of collective negotiation within group settings. Peer education settings thus might provide an ideal context in which they could come together to forge identities that would challenge existing relationships and behaviours that put their sexual health at risk. In particular, resistance building – the notion that peers can form solidaristic groups to protect themselves – forms the basis of the model. The assumption is that it takes a degree of consciousness raising and mutual empowerment to defy dominant gender and sexual norms. Thus a peer support programme, rather than HIV information alone, was the favoured vehicle.

Interviews and focus groups were held with both peer educators and subjects, gathering information on group activities and the perceived challenges in mounting the intervention. These responses were taped, translated and transcribed, and the transcripts analysed using the NUDIST software for processing large qualitative data sets. Here the realist formula context + mechanism = outcome was used to identify and code the processes and circumstances that were deemed to influence the progress (or otherwise) of the programme in achieving its desired outcome.

The overall finding is that the programme theory outlined above has little chance of being developed and sustained (and thus having an impact) in the particular circumstances of this South African trial. Just a few of the critical contexts uncovered are outlined here:

- **Highly regulated nature of the school environment.** Peer educators reported that it was difficult to overcome the tradition of didactic teaching and rote learning. Free discussion and argument had not hitherto been encouraged. Peer leaders would drift back into chalk and talk, and students automatically raised hands to ask questions.
- **Teacher control of the programme.** The goal of empowerment requires that the school should act in an advisory and non-directive capacity. Peer educators reported that they fell under the strict supervision of guidance teachers and principals, leading to disputes on the content of the programme.
- **Biomedical emphasis of the programme content.** There was relatively little focus on the social content of sexuality. Discussion was encouraged on the transmission of the virus, and on simple behavioural advice about resisting sexual advances.
- **Negative learner attitudes to the programme.** As levels of HIV have rocketed, many South Africans have responded with high levels of denial. Accordingly, some potential students ridiculed the programme, suggesting that peer leaders were themselves HIV positive.
• **Adult role models of sexual relationships.** Almost half of the informants had absent fathers, and many referred to domestic violence in their households. Expectations about the quality of sexual relationships were not high.

The authors argue that, as it is presently implemented, this programme has little chance of overcoming a whole configuration of personal, family, school and community constraints that mediate against safer sex relationships. They go on to suggest the need for further measures that might form a more comprehensive HIV prevention strategy, capable of combating some of these deeply rooted cultural impediments.

The usual limitations of qualitative inquiry apply in this case. There is no attempt to track the prevalence and consequences of these various processes (programme failure is rather taken for granted). Nevertheless, it remains an ingenious study of the balance of competing forces in peer education. As in Mellanby et al’s and Milburn’s studies (2.1 and 2.2), it shows that young people are not the best vehicle to deliver health education messages if these are conceived and presented rather formally. But unlike Mellanby et al, it describes a situation in which the balance of forces within ‘outsider youth’ are not in concert with the programme message. Ideas of resilience leading to growing resistance and self-protection may fail to thrive if, as here, there is a denial of the problem and little basis on which to build fortitude in the home and the community. So rather like Milburn’s hapless ‘A-streamers’, if for quite different reasons, this group of peer leaders may constitute an advance guard whom the majority may be loath to follow.

1 2 3
4 5 6
7 8 9

This study shows that outsider youth (at 6) seeking to build resilience and levels of self-protection amongst their peers may be undermined from both sides. That is to say, establishment adults at 1 may seek to control their activities and turn them into embryonic insiders preaching a rather different message about disease pathology. In addition, there is opposition from the other side, that is to say peers (at 3) on their way to a different insider group, namely the dominant male-oriented, violence-inclined culture. Those on this trajectory re-interpret the call for self-preservation as an indication that the peer leaders are actually untouchables at 9.


This is an account of the development of a peer education project in Scotland, exploring new ways of working with young people in the area of sexual health, HIV/AIDS and drugs. Its utility to this review is that it provides a detailed account of the actual work carried out by the peer educators and thus pinpoints more accurately the nature of successful peer-on-peer interaction.

It adds further variation on a methodological theme to the studies included in this review, for it is a ‘process evaluation’. That is to say, it is an action-based account of trial and error, highways and cul-de-sacs, deeds and misdeeds in the construction of a
particular programme. So, rather than seeking a quantitative ‘verdict’ on peer education or a constructivist account of what it felt like to the participants, it is a description and reflection upon the work done in twisting and turning the programme to make it more effective.

Given this reflective orientation, the reviewer soon discovers that many of the issues already discussed are revisited in the minds of stakeholders in this particular programme. In other words, the programme workers saw themselves as developing a model of peer education, and this is reflected in attempts to remedy what are considered weaknesses in earlier prototypes. For instance, the great debate on the autonomy of peer leaders continues here in Scotland. In recognition of the difficulties involved when adults/co-ordinators have residual control (recall cases 2.2 and 2.4), this programme was committed to a model of peer education ‘for and by young people’. But the warts-and-all activation of this ethos is also described in detail. Thus the tensions that occur when staff are asked to leave meetings, and a campaign by a radical sub-group of peer leaders for complete independence from the intervention, are all part of the analysis.

Such implementation details are not our particular concern here, except that they signify that one is dealing with a somewhat ‘purer’ form of peer support in which young people are closer to setting the agenda. And it is the agenda that is of particular interest: in what respects does peer-on-peer advice seem to stick? Here, Backett-Milburn and Watson come up with an interesting finding on the importance of ‘informal’ and ‘tailored’ contacts:

The peer educators felt that there were advantages in the use of informal approaches in that they, as individuals, could tailor what they said specifically to the other’s experience, whilst the recipient could ask exactly what they wanted to know and as many questions as s/he liked.

What emerges here is further confirmation that peer education is not chalk-and-talk as delivered by outsider fingers-and-voices. Rather it is based on peer sensitivity in being able to choose the right moment, to adopt the appropriate manner, to focus on the most receptive. The female peer educators, for example, noted how they became sensitive to power issues, in particular with boys who ‘thought they knew everything’ or ‘reduced everything to a joke’ or ‘were not in the right frame of mind’. Peer leaders also noted how their activities spilled over into friendship, family, neighbourhood and other school networks:

When you are talking to a group you have to be selective in what you say because you don’t know what different people’s reactions are going to be like, whereas if you are talking to a friend on a one-to-one basis you know what

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23 This process of stakeholder learning has huge consequences for systematic review, a point which I hope is not lost by being relegated to a footnote. The standard model of meta-analysis assumes that trials are independent events being researched independently. It is the reviewer’s task to assess and weigh studies of each trial in order to synthesise knowledge of their effectiveness. What this procedure fails to comprehend is that programme workers are forever transforming programmes on the back of their own syntheses of how they work. The fact that practitioners and policy makers are already model builders fits much more sensibly with that selfsame realist objective.

24 i.e. drunk.
their reaction will be so you know what you can say. I could probably say a lot more on a one-to-one basis than what you can say in a group because of different people, different opinions.

Of course this is ‘process’ and, in that sense, largely ‘qualitative’ research and the extent and impact of such contacts are not measured. However, the previous studies have indicated the somewhat limited compass of peer support, and this one provides a particularly acute account of the finer threads of what it refers to as ‘peer education work’.

This programme appears to generate a more autonomous group of peer leaders, who gain trust from outsiders (3,6,9) by dint of being outsiders (3,6,9). However, the influence they wield seems patchy and selective, being dependent on locating ‘the receptive’. This in turn depends on the composition of cliques and power blocs in the out-group. The situation is in some ways rather like adult-to-youth mentoring in which initial influence is created in a comfort zone of immediate similarities.

Section 2, Block 2 summary: relationships in youth peer support

On the basis of these five studies a ‘provisional’ model (see footnote 19) can be built of the relationships involved in youth peer support. The basic conclusions are drawn together in Figure 12 and the three bullet points that follow it. As can be seen from this format, the idea is to draw a contrast with Figure 11, so adding to an overall model of what forms of support work in what circumstances.

Figure 12: Key status and identity positions in ‘youth peer support’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor Social Identity (motivation)</th>
<th>Insider (full member)</th>
<th>Marginal (provisional member)</th>
<th>Outsider (non-member)</th>
<th>Mentee Social Identity (motivation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>advocate (proselytiser)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>aspirational (candidature)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>autonomous (laissez faire)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>acquiescence (resilience)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antipathy (obstructionist)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>antagonism (resistance)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Successful trajectories

Unsuccessful strategies

Typical mentee locations

Typical mentor locations
The status positions of peers and leaders (mentees and mentors if you will) is obviously different now that adults are out of the way. By and large, we are trading on ideas of using existing sub-cultures and networks to reinforce programme goals, and so all members can be considered outsiders by dint of their youth. So, as a first approximation, Figure 12 portrays both peers (diagonal stripe box) and leaders (tiled box) in column three. ‘Youth’ is not a homogeneous category, of course. Young people vary massively in their outlooks and orientations and we find them spread across the meek and the wild in the figure. So how do the patterns of influence operate here?

**Relationships in youth peer support**

- The first result is to note one pretty consistent pattern of failure (dashed lines) in the small selection of studies gathered here. Youth support, it seems, is not successful as a surreptitious ‘proxy’ for adult guidance. Youths do not pass muster as adults of a somehow more palatable kind. Thus, if a programme aspires to information-handling and organised learning these things are apparently best left to the experts (study 2.1). And if young people are perceived as carriers of adult norms and values then impact is often lost. Insofar as adults may seek to collaborate with youth leaders to prompt such direction-setting, such arrangements themselves often end in tears or tension (studies 2.4, 2.5) or pull the youth leaders apart from their peers (studies 2.2, 2.4).

- One case noted here does not quite fit this rule, the admiration for leaders of the YAP project (study 2.3). But although this was described as ‘peer education’, it seems that the credibility of these particular drug workers (some of them actually quite old) was based on the power of experience, namely that of being a former user. Such a scenario is more like the ‘been-there-done-that’ theory, and is probably better subsumed under the engagement mentoring model (Figure 10, p43).

- Peer support appears to have a better chance of working if the goals and aspirations of the programme are set by the youths themselves (study 2.5) or are already internalised by the young people (study 2.1). The five studies together show clearly the fallibility of any programme theory that treats youth as an homogenous category. The success of peer support appears to be enormously sensitive to the power blocks and minorities in which youths themselves are dispersed. Peer mentors are not so effective if they are seen as a clique (studies 2.2, 2.4). Success seems more likely if they hold a majority position (study 2.1) or if they tailor their efforts mentee by mentee (2.5) with, for instance, resilience-building being better aimed at the acquiescent than the antagonistic.

**Block 3: Workplace mentoring**

The next set of primary studies is drawn from the area of ‘corporate’ or ‘workplace’ mentoring. I borrow terms here, often found in the mentoring literature, which are used to describe the individualised, career-focused support found in many modern organisations. The corporations in question cross the public and private sectors; the work in question runs from manufacturing industry to the service sector; the mentees span entry-grade trainees to those knocking on the boardroom door; and the
programmes vary from the formal and compulsory to the informal and haphazard. In terms of the sheer mass of such schemes they perhaps outweigh ten-fold the other Blocks in this study.

This preamble is by way of indicating that the section that follows will not constitute a ‘review of corporate/workplace mentoring’ any more than Section I was a ‘review of youth mentoring’. There is no guidance on specific sectors, such as on whether nurses or doctors make good mentors or protégés. Similarly, the delights and dilemmas of trying to mentor academics, accountants and architects are not covered. Neither is there coverage of particular occupational functions, such as whether the partners buy and sell, administer, manage, manufacture, or provide services. Nor is there any examination of the significance of personal attributes, such as whether women or ethnic minorities fare well under such schemes.

The purpose, as ever, is to refine a sub-set of quite specific theories contained in Box 1 (p13). And in this respect, corporate mentoring offers us a sharply contrasting set of partnerships and goals from those considered in Blocks completed and to come. In short, the function of this selection of studies is to begin to populate the higher status/higher aspiration corners of the mentoring matrix. But even more especially, the following small set of studies is selected because of the keen attention to the explanatory staples of this review, namely the subtle differentials in status and reference group positions that underpin careers in modern organisations.


This research took the form of a postal survey of employees from mixed backgrounds. There was a gender balance and fair ethnic mix. 46% were hourly paid, 39% were salaried and 15% were first line supervisors or managers. They were ‘generally well educated’, with 40% college graduates, 51% with ‘some college’, and 9% with high school qualifications. The core of this research concerns mentees’ perceptions of different mentoring relationships and thus provides useful data on the review’s quest to understand the impact of status differences. The three types of relationship are ‘traditional’, ‘step-ahead, and ‘peer mentoring’. The authors regard these as routine distinctions in the organisational literature, and operationalised them in the paper by asking survey respondents to identify their ‘most influential mentor’ as someone who is:

- at the same level (i.e. a co-worker) who provides support
- a little more advanced and only one or two levels above in their career
- much more experienced and further ahead in their career

The survey also ascertains the respondents’ perceptions of how mentoring functioned, their general level of satisfaction with the mentor, their overall job satisfaction and career success (details of the measures omitted). All of the variables correlate noticeably with the three mentoring types as illustrated in Table 3:
Table 3: Perceived differences (means) in support and satisfaction as a function of mentor type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>Peer</th>
<th>Step-ahead</th>
<th>Traditional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocational support</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>3.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role model support</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>4.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocity</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with mentor</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>4.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
<td>-2.25</td>
<td>-1.12</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived career success</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When there is a greater status difference, mentoring is able to deliver more ‘vocational’ and ‘role model’ support (rows 1 and 3). Mentees identifying a traditional mentor as their main source of support also report greater career success. When status differences are absent or small, mentoring is able to deliver more ‘social support’ and ‘reciprocity’ (rows 2 and 4). Relationships that are stronger on the first set of functions are weaker on the latter, and vice-versa. All in all, the table provides a remarkably orderly set of findings with the step-ahead mentors holding the mid-ground on all variables. Whilst this is not precisely the same terminology as used in the earlier studies reviewed, the types of support investigated here correspond very closely to ‘aptitudinal’, ‘positional’, ‘cognitive’ and ‘affective’ resources and thus sit nicely with many of the initial hypotheses of the review. In particular, they seem to confirm the notion that peers operate best in the affective domain, and that it takes some elevation in status to be able to offer organisational gains.

But what of the ‘reference group’ distinction? Does this concept help with this particular signature of data? Ensher and colleagues make no attempt in this particular study to cover the motivations of the mentees, so there are no measures of candidature, indifference or resistance to change. But there is one jewel of information, mentioned almost in passing, which provides a vital clue. The sample of 142 protégés (51% response rate to postal questionnaire) is composed of those ‘who had formerly taken a series of professional and management development classes from a west-coast media organisation and school district in a major metropolitan area’. This was probably an expedient sample frame but it hardly generates a set of hypothesis-neutral cases. The fact that they had independently sought out career advancement, and could be bothered to respond to questions thereupon, suggests that they should mostly be located in the ‘aspirational’ reference group. This might also explain why this group expressed most overall satisfaction when they received traditional mentoring (row 5), which carries the best chances of advancement. It might also explain why respondents whose optimal access to a mentor was at the co-worker level reported less career success (row 7).

It is unlikely, then, that these very orderly findings would be produced across all situations and organisations. Even within the corporate world, mentoring schemes will sometimes have to face malcontents and will sometimes be mounted against a background of closing rather than generating opportunities. In these circumstances the opportunity to parley with senior management might not prove so welcome, and so

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25 The authors pursue a rather different set of hypotheses centred around ‘exchange theory’. Once again this review takes the controversial turn of purloining evidence produced for testing a somewhat distinct theory.
vital to career success. The findings do, nevertheless, produce a comfortable fit with the review hypothesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study examines the top row, perhaps even the top drawer, in the mentoring matrix. The status differences involved here are all 'within-organisation', so outsiders are not really in the picture. The motivational backgrounds are also solidly aspirational. Thus, arguably, partnerships here span only a fragment of the potential range (namely, 1 and 2). Nevertheless, they provide useful confirmation that seniority is required for the initiation of certain types of positional shifts, and that peers are more likely to provide solidarity.


This is a survey of the operation of mentoring schemes in two companies (energy and high-tech) in the US conducted during an ‘economic boom’ in the 1990s. Both were ‘healthy’ and interested in ‘improving the career prospects of all employees’. As can be seen from the title, it is another comparison of the impact of different mentoring relationships on a variety of organisational attitudes and behaviours. Outwardly, it seems to trade on rather similar relationships to the previous study in terms of the status differences between the different partnerships. There is a crucial difference however. In this investigation the comparison is within firms that had implemented a traditional, hierarchical mentoring system (two-levels above). For each respondent Raabe and Beehr make a comparison between (1) their formal mentoring partnerships and two other ‘workplace developmental relationships’, namely with (2) supervisors and (3) co-workers.

Here are the key results, as reported in the abstract:

Overall, there was little agreement between mentors and mentees regarding the nature of the mentoring relationship. Furthermore, the mentoring relationship was not related to mentee outcomes, while supervisory and co-worker relationships were. It is suggested that if one desires to affect job satisfaction, turnover intentions and organizational commitment, mentoring functions may be best performed by supervisors and co-workers.

In terms of headline results, the review appears to have hit upon something of a contradiction with the previous study, which uncovered significant advantages stemming from the traditional mentoring based on seniority. There are some key design differences between the studies, however, which in part may explain the outcome discrepancies. In the previous study, subjects were asked to identify their ‘most significant mentor’ and then answer questionnaire items in respect of their

26 Reviews always face inconsistent results. They are part of the staple diet of evaluation research. Rather than pooling them in a statistical wash or taking sides on methodological grounds, it is often a useful exercise in realist synthesis to account for and thus reconcile the differences. Thereby lies another route to theory development.
relationship with that person. The precise meaning of the term ‘mentor’ is for the respondent to decide and we do not know which or how many of the individuals so identified are located in formal company-sponsored schemes. What is more, the respondents only provide data on their most significant partner. The core comparison in the previous study is between three types of partnerships as experienced by different dyads, whereas the present study looks at three types of partnerships with a common recipient.

Whilst like is not being compared with like across the two studies, there are significant findings that must be absorbed into the review. ‘Mentors believed that they were giving a little more career development than mentees believed they were getting, but mentees believed there was more mutual psychosocial support and that they were modelling their behaviours after the mentors more than the mentors thought.’ [Supportive data not illustrated here]. This tells us that the sheer existence of a partnership is not the same thing as a working partnership producing changes. In the other spheres of mentoring examined here, we have seen and will see that mentoring relationships are always fragile. In a mandated company scheme, it might be that it is easier to ‘go though the motions’ than to really partake or break with an ineffectual partnership.

Turning now to the crucial matter of outcomes, the main differences between the different partnerships are provided in the following table:

### Table 4: Correlations of mentee outcomes in different relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Job satisfaction</th>
<th>Organizational commitment</th>
<th>Turnover intent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mentor Relationships</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career development</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychosocial support</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role modelling</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supervisor Relationships</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect</td>
<td>0.26**</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.26**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional respect</td>
<td>0.53***</td>
<td>0.27**</td>
<td>-0.44***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>0.49***</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>-0.26**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution</td>
<td>0.25*</td>
<td>0.29**</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Co-worker Relationships</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.44***</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional respect</td>
<td>0.43***</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>0.33**</td>
<td>-0.27**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.38***</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p* < 0.10; p** < 0.05; p*** < 0.01

The table gives the correlations between outcomes – i.e. whether mentees express job satisfaction, organisational commitment or the desire to leave – and their view of the alternative relationships. The rows express the quality of the relationships with, for instance, ‘loyalty’ being measured by agreement to items like ‘my supervisor/co-worker would defend me to others in the organisation if I made an honest mistake’.
In interpreting the table, the authors note: ‘Overall it is apparent that the mentor relationship tended to have the least relationship with the mentees’ outcomes. None of the nine correlations was significant. Both coworker and supervisor relationships had a larger number of significant relations with the outcomes.’ It is possible to take methodological umbrage with the fine details here: different items are used to measure the quality of the relationship; the questionnaire items are perhaps somewhat wooden; once again we are dealing only in reported outcomes, etc. Nevertheless, these are stark discrepancies and they require careful interpretation.

The authors examine several possibilities before coming to this conclusion:

We must consider the obvious possibility, however, that formal mentoring programs of the type in the present study are simply disadvantaged for affecting mentee outcomes; mentors who are two levels above the mentors are not normally in close contact with them, and because of their relatively high level of responsibility, they might often be too busy and not have a great deal of time to spend with the mentee as an extra task.

This quite reasonable inference is further supported by the general drift of evidence uncovered thus far. That is to say, mentoring appears to work on a fairly slow fuse, building up from personal contact which is the very currency in short supply here. So whilst management might have the resources to point the way to training and positional gains, the basic contact might not be meaningful enough for mentees to be able to cash in these chips.

The study does offer some support, however, for a modified version of the mentor-as-role-model theory. If one compares the outcomes for supervisor and co-worker relationship on a crude ‘asterisk-counting’ level, one sees that a successful bond with a supervisor appears to offer more statistically significant support. This is especially so in terms of job satisfaction and intention to stay put. These associations hint, at least, at the developmental potential of having a somewhat more senior mentor.

It transpires, then, that these two studies are not as inconsistent as at first appearance. In the former, the mentees identified their ‘most influential mentor’ and, if this happened to be a senior manager, then vocational support and role modelling followed. In the latter study, the mentees engaged with a senior as part of a formal scheme and no such support was apparent. However, the comparisons in the company scheme are with ‘a supervisor’ and ‘best-liked co-worker’ whom the respondents identify as part of the investigation. Not surprisingly, more support is forthcoming from these quarters.

What emerges from the two studies is the refined hypotheses that career progress is assisted by having a successful relationship with a more senior mentor. However, work-based mentoring is very much a one-step-at-a-time process, requiring some initial mutual identification before gains are made. Further interesting questions about whether this package is best achieved by informal over formal means, or by a system of ‘mentor teams’ are beyond the scope of this review (Higgins and Kram, 2001).
This study also deals with shifts from 2 to 1 and portrays them, quite properly, as rather long moves. Developmental support is not often achieved in a one-leap, formally-structured relationship with a senior colleague. Rather it is better handled in a one step at a time sequence via peers and supervisors (distributed throughout 2), with the latter able to pull some organisational levers.

Study 3.3: Hale R (2000) To match or mis-match? The dynamics of mentoring as a route to personal and organisational learning Career Development International 5(4) pp223-234

This study is based on 47 semi-structured interviews and 29 questionnaire returns conducted on two company mentoring schemes in the UK (Scottish Hydro-Electric and the Skipton Building Society). It poses directly the question about whether it is possible to ‘engineer’ the right dynamics in mentoring relationships. In particular, Hale notes that despite ‘the widespread recognition that the utmost care is needed in nurturing a match…there is no evidence of a constantly reliable approach’.

The author’s starting point is a recognition of two constant themes of this review, namely that:
- Mentoring relationships may have different goals (Hale distinguishes ‘relationship development’ and ‘learning’).
- The partners’ motivations may differ (Hale contrasts those ready to work with ‘a more challenging and confrontational style’ and those preferring ‘a more comfortable relationship’).

These concepts are brought together in Hale’s conclusions which are reproduced on the next page, and additionally presented in the form of a model as illustrated in Figures 13 and 14:
If the aim is speed up the development of a relationship then an important consideration will be to seek similarities in terms of, for instance, interests or academic or professional backgrounds or even family circumstances. Mentees in the research were quite clear in stating that these factors helped speed the development of rapport and trust.

If the aim is to optimise learning…there is a need to look for contrasts in learning style, strengths and development needs. However, one should seek some similarity in terms of overall values, beliefs and life-goals. The research showed clearly that where relationships failed most dramatically in terms of learning and sustainability, this was attributed by both mentors and mentees to fundamental differences at this level.
There is some consistency here with the results of the previous studies. Learning (or in our terms attitudinal/positional shifts) is promoted if the mentor is 'more than one level up' from the mentee. But these relationships tend to break down without an anchor in mutual values (or in our terms some sort of affective base). Relationship development (or in our terms befriending) is enabled on the basis of shared status and workaday relationships.

The research report is written in such a way that it is difficult to judge whether to share the author’s confidence in the verisimilitude of these particular inferences. First-hand testimony from the semi-structured interviews is entirely absent. There is no detailed reportage of the reasoning underpinning the reported viewpoints. No numerical contrasts are drawn in terms of the prevalence of the viewpoints attributed. Hale presents evidence using a peculiar mix of third part reportage of his own research, combined with the authenticating voice of other authors:

There is much support for the views of Hay (1995) that too much similarity of working style may lead to comfort rather than a learning challenge but that too much contrast can lead to irreconcilable differences. In the cases in the research where individuals felt there was too much contrast in values and beliefs, one party would simply allow the relationship to falter rather than confronting the other party.’ [Reference not claimed for this paper]

So can we place any faith in the model and the two propositions above? I think, on balance, it is possible to do so. This is not an example of the promotional, mentoring-as-corporate-elixir papers that frequent the popular end of the management literature. The accounts provided (however truncated) do show a pattern of success and failure across the different facets of mentoring. The fact that the author places his results alongside findings from previous investigations, and is able to adduce supportive evidence explaining what works and what doesn’t, is not unlike the analytic process employed here. It provides a sense of anchorage and cumulation to the evidence base.

This study provides some modest evidence that learning (i.e. positional advantage) comes from having a mentor 'more than one level up' (i.e. with some distance between the precise locations within 1 and 2). However, as with other results on the long move, such status 'mismatches' must have some anchor in basic mutual values. Peers, in company and social status terms (2s all), tend to befriend better and enjoy the limited benefits that ensue.

27 And on which days of futile research time was spent.
Mullen’s study isolates a very specific question that is strategically important for this review. In the studies in Block 1, we found it rare indeed for any individual mentor to be able to act intensively enough to befriend and direction-set and coach and advocate. In the less torrid world of workplace mentoring we see the beginnings of a pattern in which it is also difficult for mentors to deliver on all potential functions. Mentors who are several levels up in terms of seniority are indeed at an advantage in being able to deliver better career prospects, but this seems to depend on an element of mentee selection (study 3.1) or the partnership being based on some mutual personal predisposition (study 3.3). Conversely, mentors who are fellow peers or just immediately senior operate best in the affective sphere (study 3.3) and in the consolidation (if not advancement) of organisational position (study 3.2).

Mullen’s study attempts to profile the characteristics of individuals who are able to operate intensively across mentoring’s various roles. The research took the form of a self-completed questionnaire distributed in ‘seventeen Midwestern organizations, ranging from insurance, to health care to manufacturing’. Both mentors and mentees were approached, versions of the questionnaire being routed via human resources directors and from one partner to the other. This rather optimistic strategy resulted in a very low response rate (just under 10%). This, together with the mix of research locations, means that little can be deciphered about the context or the operation of the mentoring schemes to which the respondents refer. In this reviewer’s opinion, however, it does not disqualify the study from the review. The fact that these sample remnants are likely to consist of the views of the keenest of the keen is no particular hindrance, given that it is precisely this optimal corner of mentoring that is under examination.

The dependent variable is based on a seven-item scale measuring the mentor’s performance as seen from the protégé’s perspective. Mentors are regarded as ‘dual-function’ if their mentee had answered in the affirmative to items like:
• My mentor has conveyed empathy for the concerns and feeling I have discussed with him or her, and
• My mentor has suggested specific strategies for achieving my career goals

The independent variables are made up of demographic and attitudinal information from both sets of respondents, together with what they had to say about the nature of their relationship. As ever with self-report surveys of this kind, the data are a pale shadow of the actual experiences and are open to a variety of interpretations.

There is, nevertheless, a very strong patterning in the correlates of dual functioning. These are reported using three-stage hierarchical regression equations on both protégé and mentor samples. This technique allows the influence of ‘demographic characteristics’, ‘relationship characteristics’ and ‘perceptions and attitudes’ to be estimated separately. The formal analysis is too complex to reproduce here, and only the most significant associations are discussed. Mentors and mentees (once again) are not at one in reporting the factors associated with dual-function relationships. According to mentors the following are significant:
• ‘The mentor is more likely to initiate such relationships.’ This factor was measured by a single item, namely ‘who initiated the relationship?’. Since it always takes two to tango in mentoring, it is not perfectly clear what distinguishes a mentor-initiated relationship. Mullen, moreover, had not anticipated such a finding in his pre-investigation hypotheses and rather wobbles to an interpretation that ‘it could indicate that mentors who initiate a relationship have greater intentions to serve the desired functions’. The strong correlation here could indeed be a mark of the true mentor or it could, for instance, be a case of protégé-spotting – a common enough preoccupation of those in, and wishing to consolidate, senior positions.

• ‘More combined functions were reportedly performed by older mentors than by younger ones.’ Mullen has a rather bizarre shot at this one: ‘perhaps the nearer one is to retiring, the more willing one is to devote time and effort to being a mentor’. One wonders whether she bothered to check how many of her sample were pushing retirement and whether altruism or bloody-mindedness prevails in the fifth and sixth decades. Age crops up in many surveys as a key determinant of behaviour. It is just a general proxy for experience and an alternative explanation here, perhaps, is that one has to already have been there to have done that and to be able to pass on the tale.

• ‘Perceived protégé competence was the strongest predictor examined.’ Here Mullen is content to rephrase the finding, ‘it appears that mentors who perceive their mentee as competent are more willing to invest their time and effort’. It might indeed be a case of preferring to lead willing horses but, again, the reciprocal benefits of being surrounded by the worthy and the willing are not to be discounted.

• ‘Mentors who felt that they mattered to the organization served higher levels of [dual mentoring].’ Mullen thinks that this is ‘perhaps due to them thinking that they have something to offer their protégés’. It could also mean that they had responsibilities to their companies, and bringing along the troops might be part and parcel of a leadership role.

• ‘Mentors who reported being influenced by their protégés served higher levels of [dual mentoring].’ Mullen interprets this in terms of ‘reciprocity’; that mentors actually get something back from intense mentoring. Another interpretation might see this as an artefact of method. Dual function mentoring (the dependent variable) includes the reporting of being psychologically close and, not surprisingly, there will be a correlation with (an ‘independent’ variable) capturing openness to the mentee’s contribution.

The data from the mentees were less clear cut in throwing up correlates of intense mentoring:
‘Amongst the protégés, the only significant predictor of vocational and psychological functions was which party initiated the mentorship.’ The decisive move was mentor-initiated. This is an interesting confirmation of the senior partner taking the lead, as viewed from the other side of the coin. Mullen provides no particular interpretation in this instance and sticks with the reportage of the relationship. From the point of view of the review, however, a clear interpretation lurks. We have seen that mentoring works best when mentees are willing, and this finding reinforces the reference group theory that the aspirational are psychologically attuned to move, and best placed to benefit from positional shifts. What they lack and what they seek, says this datum, form the entry ticket.

Non-significant relationships also provide important explanatory material in broad sweep surveys of this kind. Mullen reports that:

‘The hierarchical distance between mentor and protégé was not related to the mentoring function being served.’ Although a null result, it is regarded as an unexpected and positive finding. Mullen finds encouragement here because it opens up the pool of potential partnerships and it is not just a case of mentoring feeding traditional lines of company internal promotion. In itself, however, it cannot be regarded as decisive because we have seen (in studies 3.1 and 3.2) that having a mentor a ‘number-of-levels-up’ can excite or thwart ambition. In this case, mentee potential and raw talent seems to be the prerequisite, rather than place in the pecking order.

This research is strategically important for this review and it provides useful evidence for our model, if not in the form to which Mullen’s survey aspired. He sought a ‘formula’ for intensive mentoring and tries to capture it in a regression model. The problem is that the variables in themselves do not explain, as I have tried to show in the appraisal above. It is simply not possible to know the precise motivations that underlie the statistical associations. Mullen’s findings, therefore, cannot be understood as some sort of recipe: get mentors of the right age and sensitivity to initiate a relationship, listen to their protégés, and so forth. But what this research does show is a strong signature of the positions and aspirations that encourage dual mentoring. Basically, workplace mentoring works most intensively when the most powerful and most experienced nurture and acknowledge the most competent and the most willing. Now, whilst this is a very clear message from the top drawer of the mentoring matrix it raises an awkward question for mentoring itself, and one raised by Mullen himself: namely ‘who needs mentoring most?’

An interesting footnote lies here. By and large the UK mentoring literature uses the term ‘mentee’ to refer to the junior partner. The US research, often but not always, prefers the term protégé. The latter appears to be fading from the academic argot, perhaps due to the fact that in everyday terminology it carries the insinuation of being picked out from the ranks for special patronage. This study suggests that patronage is alive and well in this corner of the mentoring business.
implies that the most successful of them go so far as to proselytise for entry into these command positions (they are most definitely 1s rather than 4s). The mentees’ precise positions in the organisation seem less important (they are spread through 2). However, those who receive the full diet of mentoring show a willingness to be led. As per our theory, they aspire to upward mobility (they are most definitely 2s rather than 5s).


This is a qualitative study of ‘the perceptions of junior/senior staff about the value of formal and informal mentoring for a recently merged CPA [accountancy] firm’. Its value to the study is to reveal more about the subtleties of choice of mentoring partnerships in the corporate world. Of particular interest is the background of the merger. A realist synthesis presupposes that there will be no single set pattern of positions and functions to carry out every conceivable task put to mentoring in the workplace. Examining preferences at times of turbulence provides a critical case that will assist in understanding the balance of personal and career development mechanisms29.

The study consisted of a series of in-depth interviews with 24 subjects drawn from two international CPA firms that were in the process of merging. The subjects ranged from junior staff with less than two years experience to senior partners in the existing firms. The analysis is conducted by grounded theory; classifying, coding and sorting responses in order to spot a sense of a pattern in the accounts of how mentoring straddled the period of merger.

One set of findings concerns the perceived merit of formal or informal mentoring. According to Seigel and Reinstein, most prior studies had found a general preference for informal mentoring but here at the more junior levels the inclination is towards a formal partnership (see Table 5 on the next page). This, according to the authors, is a matter of less well established employees seeking anchorage in the organisational hierarchy in stressful conditions. This follows a clear pattern we have seen earlier (studies 3.1, 3.4) about the aspirational but marginal seeking linkages to higher status peers. This seems to hold when the greasy pole gets that much more slippery. However, the confidentiality and comfort of the informal system remains important to the more senior even under turbulent conditions: ‘It is difficult to designate or assign a formal mentor. A true mentor occurs informally when two people feel comfortable with each other.’

29 Note, once again, the very specific rationale for exploring this case. There is a small specialist literature, of which this study is an example, on ‘survival’ mentoring. Mergers, transfers, restructuring, promotion, demotion all bring challenges of a type that mentoring is often thought well placed to tackle. A key finding, incidentally, is that former survivors are best placed to carry out survival mentoring (been there, survived that). This review is not designed to flow hither and thither into these specialist tasks of workplace mentoring like preparing for retirement, work/family conflicts, etc. (for a study exploring these: see Seigel, 2000). To repeat for emphasis, all studies in this review are subordinated to the task of exploring the hypotheses that drive the synthesis; in this case to learn more about the balance between personal and positional mentoring.
Table 5: System preference by organisational level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Formal</th>
<th>Informal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another set of informal prompts about ‘what the mentees sought from mentors during the merger’ was sorted and coded to reveal the following pattern (Table 6). In this case all employees at all levels, bar the partners, prefer psycho-social advice (e.g. on survival) over career advancement (e.g. tips for advancement).

Table 6: Function preference by organisational level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Psycho-social</th>
<th>Career development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is understandable enough but considered as a deviation by the authors from the normal pattern in which individuals who feel secure about their professional accomplishments tend to shun mentoring alliances. Uncertainty and low morale create the tendency to seek personal support:

We have lost people in our division. My frustration is that we do not have dynamic partner leadership to replace those lost to the merger. My mentor has helped me cope with the frustration, even though he doesn’t always know what to do. He tells me what to watch out for, what not to do...

This year we had this merger and people were talking about how bad everyone else was, ranking him or her to determine who was going to be left. I called my mentor, and he wrote a little memo. He was a friend of mine: he intervened by calling one of the partners to see what was going on...

…We’re really trying to feel our way through the process. Over time, the merger will take its effect… They’re trying to tell you that you’re not to be put out of a job, but I don’t know. I needed meaningful feedback on where I stand and how to act. The merger forced me to find a different kind of mentor.

This study, again from the top drawer (1, 2) of mentoring relationships, confirms some previous patterns in showing that a blend of positional and personal functions is performed. More junior employees (bottom 2s) still show some preference for formal mentoring embedded in the organisational hierarchy (upper 1s). But because it is conducted in a period of uncertainty, the research indicates that informal, personal, confidence-building relationships come to the fore.
In matrix terms, this is explicable in terms of the partners experiencing an unexpected drop into marginal status (both become 2s, so to speak). And, as before in such circumstances, we have seen that resilience building is the forte of peers.


This study opens the door to some vast questions about the efficacy of workplace mentoring for two rather significant groups of employees. This review only takes a peek inside that door since reviews have to be selective, and ‘diversity mentoring’ can be considered a topic in its own right (Clutterbuck and Ragins, 2002). McGuire’s study is selected for two reasons. The first is that it employs what the author calls a ‘structural perspective’. This is defined as follows: ‘Structuralists focus on how positions of individuals in social systems provide various opportunities for action and also place constraints on behavior – what some scholars call the opportunity context.’ This chimes rather well with the status and reference group perspectives that underpin this inquiry, and the study will be ransacked for the purpose of refining these theories. The second reason is to provide a comparison with study 1.9 from the youth mentoring block, our only previous look at race.

The corporation studied was a major operator in the financial service sector, and the research took the form of a stratified random sample survey of its ‘home office’ in which 1,756 employees were contacted, of whom 65% responded. Gender and race composition was as follows: ‘31% are White women, 30% are White men, 26% are women of color, 135 are men of color.’ The survey used a variety of measures covering ‘access’ to mentors and other support, ‘type’ of support offered, and mentor and protégé ‘characteristics’. Details of the respective measures will be covered as we come to the analysis.

McGuire’s first conclusion is about ‘access’ to mentors, which was determined by first of all getting respondents to map their collegial networks and then asking whether the individuals concerned could be said to have taken them ‘under their wing’. She reports that people of colour are just as adept at forming mentor relations as whites, as are women in comparison with men. This non-significant difference in access also applies to the interaction between race and sex. However, as in study 1.9, there is ‘homophily’ in the pairings. For example, 61% of women’s mentors were women, 66% of men’s mentors were men. In terms of race, ‘35% of mentors for people of color were themselves people of color, whereas 7% of mentors for White people were people of color.’

In terms of the ‘type of help’ offered across race and sex, there are also significant differences, as illustrated in the following tables:
Table 7:
Average amount of instrumental help received by women and men

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex of protégé</th>
<th>Average amount of instrumental help</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women (N=927)</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men (N=660)</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant at .05

Table 8:
Average amount of socioemotional help received by women and men

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex of protégé</th>
<th>Average amount of socioemotional help</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women (N=927)</td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men (N=660)</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant at .05

Table 9:
Average amount of instrumental help received by People of Colour and Whites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race of protégé</th>
<th>Average amount of instrumental help</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People of colour (N=573)</td>
<td>3.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whites (N=1012)</td>
<td>3.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant at .05

Table 10:
Average amount of socioemotional help received by People of Colour and Whites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race of protégé</th>
<th>Average amount of instrumental help</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People of colour (N=573)</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whites (N=1012)</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant at .05

The data here relate to questions about help with ‘red tape’ and ‘promotion’ on the one side and ‘personal problems’ and ‘moral support’ on the other, and compare closely with the distinctions between positional and personal support encountered throughout the review. And there is a clear pattern: ‘men’ and ‘whites’ get the instrumental help; ‘women’ and ‘people of colour’ get socioemotional assistance. How is this explained? One possibility is to look more closely at who is giving the help and to examine, for instance, if same-race and cross-race or same-sex and cross-sex matches differ. The following tables present the results for race:

Table 11:
Average instrumental help by protégé’s race and mentor’s race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>White mentor</th>
<th>Mentor of colour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White protégé</td>
<td>3.37 (N = 904)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protégé of colour</td>
<td>3.21 (N = 353)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significance of protégé’s and mentor’s race at .05

Table 12:
Average socioemotional help by protégé’s race and mentor’s race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>White mentor</th>
<th>Mentor of colour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White protégé</td>
<td>1.54 (N = 929)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protégé of colour</td>
<td>1.58 (N = 353)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significance of protégé’s race and interaction term at .05
White mentors give more instrumental help than their counterparts of colour, but they both distribute that help more towards white mentees. White mentors and mentors of colour do not offer significantly different levels of socioemotional support, but the latter offer the protective wing much more significantly in same race partnerships.

McGuire offers two perfectly plausible explanations for this pattern. The higher levels of socioemotional help may follow from cultural differences, with employees of colour creating tighter bonds: ‘30% of people of color with white mentors describe their relationship as very close compared to 40% of people of color with mentors of color’. However her main explanatory efforts ‘confirm the structuralists’ wisdom’:

Among my sample of employees at US Finance, women and people of color were less likely than men and Whites to be managers and officers. Lower ranking employees also have, on average, lower ranking mentors and sponsors. In my sample, White protégés were significantly more likely than protégés of color to have mentors who were supervisors and managers; 73% of Whites’ mentors occupied the rank of supervisor or higher whereas only 56% of the mentors of people of color did. Women’s mentors were also less likely to be supervisors and managers than men’s mentors. In addition, protégés of color were less likely to have mentors who made the final decision on important corporate matters, made large purchases of their own, and had access to confidential information.

In short the partnerships are operating in different pools. People of colour and women are more likely to swim with the ranks of the marginal, as do their mentors. White men have more access to senior (white male) mentors. It is these differences in resources which are likely to colour the mentoring mechanism.

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<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study, although picking up on race and gender issues for the first time in workplace research, confirms a rather well worn pattern. Women and people of colour operate in different corporate spheres, and these provide quite different opportunity contexts. Mentors at 1 are able to offer more career support than those operating from 2. Mentors at 2 are more likely to provide personal support.

Section 2, Block 3 summary: relationships in workplace mentoring

Individual development support is more supplied and sought after in workplace mentoring than in the other spheres selected in this review. Because mentoring is relatively routine and popular, the key explanatory quest is to discover its precise reach: for whom, in what circumstances and in what respects is it of assistance? Answering this question confronts the difficult task of trying to distinguish mentoring operations from other naturally occurring forms of supervision and support.

On the basis of these six studies another highly provisional model can be built of the relationships involved in workplace/corporate mentoring The basic conclusions are
drawn together in Figure 15 and the two bullet points that follow it. The idea, once again is to draw a contrast with Figures 11 (p45) and 12 (p55), so furthering the overall model about which mentoring relations function to which effects.

Most of the action in this instance is in cells 1 and 2. The schemes under review here are all ‘in-house’, mounted within organisational hierarchies and thus not dealing in any significant sense with ‘outsiders’. In most of the schemes discussed, and in workplace mentoring generally, participation is voluntary and sometimes entirely informal. It is safe to assume that there are relatively few obstructionist mentors (7) and antagonistic mentees (9) around, though recall an earlier note (on p6) to studies that managed to unearth them. Figure 15 thus distributes the typical partnerships across cells 1 and 2 with, as before, the tiled cells representing mentees and the mentors being striped. There are two exceptions to this illustrative device. The first is to deal with mentees who are ‘outsiders’ in the sense that demographics place them in a group that is subordinate in societal terms. Employees belonging, for instance, to racial minorities are placed on the border into cell 3, this being a crude representation of what is generally a mixed-status location, for in workplace terms they are certainly not outsiders. The figure also places some partnerships on a motivational border, slipping into the second row, in recognition that staying put and survival are entirely sufficient ambitions in many a workplace.

**Figure 15: Key status and identity positions in ‘workplace mentoring’**

Before conclusions are drawn, I add the customary rider that this is a decidedly selective sample of studies, drawn to pursue highly specific theories. These cases share some typical limitations with the armada of workplace mentoring inquiries from whence they come. The vast, vast majority rely on reported measures (reported satisfaction, reported functions, reported outcomes) to assess the impact of mentoring.
Thus the patterns of relative success and failure noted in this summary must be interpreted with this proviso in mind. Mentoring is a long-term business and few studies have the resources and staying power to observe behavioural transformations, which is not to say, of course, that in-the-eye-of-the-beholder change is unimportant.

**Relationships in workplace mentoring**

- Aspirations for workplace mentoring are high, broadly speaking, on the basis that partnerships based on the personal support provided by a mentor can also provide positional advantage. Mentors who are several levels up in terms of seniority are, not surprisingly, at an advantage in being able to deliver better career prospects, and are somewhat cherished for this function (study 3.1). However, this prospect does not seem open to each and every employee; indeed it may be something of a rarity. Study 3.1 only relates to the opinions of mentees who had been able to forge such relationships, and the remaining inquiries set qualifications on when this may come to pass. Study 3.2 shows that if the senior-to-junior arrangement is made formally, rather than as part of operational routine, the attachment is not likely to be as solid; study 3.3 indicates that it is likely to operate only if there is a personal footing in shared norms and values; study 3.6 shows that such dyads are also likely to be pre-selected on demographic grounds; and study 3.4 shows that there is often an element of mentor selection of preferred protégé. I therefore come to a cautious conclusion that the positional advantages that stem from workplace mentoring are relatively ‘short move’ and tend to accrue to the well-motivated already at the threshold of more senior positions (illustrated by the upper left pairing in Figure 15).

- Workplace mentoring also provides important functions in terms of affective contacts and basic direction setting. These ‘psycho-social’ functions are not always what employees want from mentoring (studies 3.2, 3.5) but it is more likely to be what they get (studies 3.2, 3.6). Mentors who are fellow peers or just immediately senior operate best in the affective sphere (study 3.3) and in the consolidation (if not advancement) of organisational position (study 3.2). This affective function also surfaces at times of organisational change in which former insiders become marginal (study 3.5) and in which survivors of former upheavals are best placed to provide supportive mentoring. The ‘socioemotional’ also surfaces in the lower and intermediate ranks of organisations in which structural minorities also tend to gather.

**Block 4: Support for those with a disabling illness**

The final sub-set of the studies under review returns to the question of support for those with ‘outsider’ status. The experience of a disabling illness is an intensely social one. Serious illness often triggers a search for help and the desire to talk to others, in order better to understand a particular medical condition and its consequences. Friends, relatives and health care professionals consist of the front line in such a dialogue but, increasingly, illness sufferers have turned to those in a similar position. Inspection of the phenomenon of ‘self help’ and ‘support’ groups can, therefore, assist in our understanding of like-with-like relationships. Again, there is a caveat that these are often group rather than individual relationships and may thus not meet some
commonly understood definitions of mentoring. Once again, this ‘sideways look’ is justified by concentrating on the characteristics of those involved rather than group dynamics.

**Study 4.1: Weis J (2003) Support groups for cancer patients Supportive Care in Cancer 11(12) pp763-768**

This first study is itself an ‘overview’ of the nature of support groups for cancer patients and this summary will play an even more general role here, since the themes highlighted are in general currency in this literature. One of Weis’s tasks is to specify the distinctive aims of support groups and this is illustrated in the following table. ‘Group therapy’ is nothing new in cancer treatment but can be usefully contrasted with peer support to provide an illustration of some typical objectives:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 13: Objectives of group therapy and support groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group Therapy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxation, guided imagery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuro-psychological training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art therapy, ergotherapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychoeducation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didactic information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This allows us to see at a glance differences in the sources of support. In the former, all the ideas originate from outside the patient group, whereas the converse is true in the second column. The study also extracts information on published claims about the nature of the bond built between members. Fellow support is said to ‘help diminish the sense of stigma and overcome isolation’; to ‘build bonds with others [and] development identification with the group’; to ‘help other members of the group to cope better [and to] find emotional balance in helping others’; to ‘express emotions [and] to test changes in behaviour within a sheltered framework’. All of these mechanisms are considered to fall outside the compass of traditional treatments and therapies because they stem from the benefits of close personal identification.

Weis also provides a brief, descriptive vote-counting review of the major investigations of the efficacy of support groups. This being a cancer study, ‘survival’, ‘recurrence’, ‘immunological improvement’ and so on are important outcome measures, and on these scores Weis reckons that the jury on self-help is still out. However, in respect of ‘quality of life’ and ‘psychological adjustment’ indicators, he claims there is ‘strong empirical evidence’ in favour of support groups.

There is also a brief account of some studies uncovering the correlates and compositional features of self-help groups, which provides a first clue on the characteristics of those most likely to benefit.

Cunningham et al concluded that a small highly motivated minority among cancer patients, those who become highly engaged in psychological work, may possibly benefit in terms of prolonged survival. In the same direction, there may be some indication from other research that interventions are most
effective when administered to patients during critical events (e.g. diagnosis, recurrence) and times of high distress. [Reference not claimed for this paper]

Such evidence, of course, enters this review as second-hand description and only makes a prima facie case.

This study sets up the basic parameters for understanding illness self-help groups. Both mentors and mentees are outsiders (3,6,9). There is prima facie evidence that those participating in, and perhaps benefitting from, support groups are experiencing some critical life shift. The benefits of mutual help do not appear to lie in cure and rehabilitation, that is moves back to marginal or insider status (1,2,4,5,7,8). Rather they lie in coping and emotional support: the by now traditional virtue of building reliance (to stay at 6) surfaces once again.


This study was designed to pinpoint what parents of children with disabilities find helpful about mutual support groups. The authors commence by noting that whilst having a disabled child does not necessarily lead to difficulties, the literature does document grief, loss, guilt, isolation, marginalisation, stigmatisation and disempowerment as potential consequences.

Six support groups affiliated to the UK charity Contact a Family participated in the study. The respondents are profiled in some detail, with four characteristics noted here: 52 members were women and three were men; occupations (self or partner’s) were skewed towards professional and skilled groups; the mean length of participation in the groups was 3.9 years; and ‘29% had children with a specific learning disability, 27% had children with severe or profound mental or physical disability, 25% had children with disorders on the autistic continuum, 11% had children with moderate learning difficulties’ [9% missing data].

Views were sought through fixed choice questionnaire items and in lightly prompted focus groups. The formal measures ‘indicated that members found the groups very helpful and were very satisfied about with the support they received…they also described the groups as high in cohesion, expressiveness, task-orientation and self discovery’. These expressions of satisfaction are, of course, hardly surprising given the longevity of memberships. And, perhaps accordingly, the authors concentrate on the results of the focus group analysis, which describe in greater depth the nature of the perceived benefits.

The qualitative analysis was done using a coding procedure generating first and then higher-order constructs following the ‘grounded theory’ approach. The idea is to unearth and group the core sentiments as they emerge from discussion. Three higher-order constructs emerged from this analysis. These parents valued, above all, the utility of mutual support in generating:
• A sense of control/agency in the world
• A feeling of community/belonging
• A command over self-change

As with many qualitative studies, these emotions are (best) conveyed with illustrative quotations from members of the group:

If you go into the [educational statementing] process, you’ll end up with what the professional wants to give you, whereas if you go in with the right level of knowledge because you’ve talked to parents who’ve been through it already, then hopefully you’ll come out with what’s best for you and your child. You learn from other people’s mistakes…

It’s like grief when you’ve got an autistic child. I think it’s worse than grieving a death, I honestly do. You grieve all the child’s life, as you see that child struggle, but you try telling your neighbour. You couldn’t tell that to anyone else because they wouldn’t understand. We know we don’t have to explain that to each other because we all know we’re going through exactly the same grief. If you lose a child, everyone understands your grieving, but if you have got a handicapped child you’re treated as a second class citizen, the whole family are. But there’s nobody you can turn to. You’re lucky if someone in your family understands you, but they never understand you like these people do.

The authors acknowledge, as usual for a qualitative study, that their inquiry suffers from ‘selection bias’ (only the committed come forward; only women appear in any number) and from the ‘social desirability effect’ (they would say that wouldn’t they). And, of course, there is no attempt to generalise and calculate net effects here. The data, however, resonate with the problems of dealing with an acquired outsider status (‘second class citizens’). The authors themselves use a version of social identity theory to explain why the groups work for this particular group of stakeholders:

…the mutual support groups in this study offer an example of a service model based on the concept of social identity rather than integration. Social identity theory predicts that if one is unable to leave a devalued social group, the one consequence is to engage in social action to improve the group’s status, and to enhance one’s social identity.

…these changes derived in part from the “experiential knowledge” (Borkman, 1990) shared by other people who had gone though the same experience. The groups seemed to provide parents with a range of coping resources found in the literature (Beresford, 1994). [References not claimed for this paper]
can say little more than that supporters and supported are solidly in categories 6 and 9. The research comes into its own in describing the nature of the relationship which is highly characteristic of these categories, namely high on coping strategies and prepared to do battle with outsiders. Life’s history is also important, with having ‘gone through it’ the key source of inspiration.


The great majority of the mentoring and peer support studies reviewed throughout this inquiry involve voluntary participation. Self-help groups, too, are self-selected and this study attempts a large survey of support group participation in order to address the questions ‘who participates and why’. In particular, the inquiry is led by the question ‘what kinds of illness experience prompt patients to seek each other’s company’. The unit of analysis for the comparison is thus ‘illness-type’, with twenty ‘diagnostic categories’ being investigated in order to discover which of them engender greater rates of participation. The study was carried out on ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ groups. There is no analysis here of the findings on the latter, namely ‘on-line support groups’, since the theory under test is about engaging in face-to-face mutual support. So, what sort of person builds bonds with ‘significant others’ in search of the benefits described in the two previous studies?

Davison et al’s participation survey examined group formation in the four metropolitan areas of Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles and New York. Registers and compilations and handbooks were scoured to arrive at a list of potential support groups. These were then checked individually to ensure that they were active, were not duplicates, and involved no significant costs for participation. Once identified, the organisations were classified by illness category and further information was collected on the number of their affiliated groups, frequency of meetings, average group sizes and so on. The information allows the calculation of several different indicators of participation rates, and the key results are presented as ‘prevalence-adjusted indicators’. That is to say, a greater number of groups would be expected to form automatically with respect to common illnesses, with less activity for rare conditions. By this and other means, the data are standardised to give a like-with-like measure of support-seeking under different health challenges. ‘League tables’ of participation are presented in a variety of formats, which I reduce to the following ‘headlines’:

The tendency to participate in support groups was highly consistent by category across cities. The highest levels of support were found in cases of alcoholism, AIDS, breast cancer, and anorexia, and the lowest level of support were found in cases of hypertension, migraine, ulcer, and chronic pain.

But what really attracts the authors’ attention is the huge variation in rate of support-group formation, after adjusting for prevalence:

AIDS patients are, for instance, are 250 more times likely to participate in support than hypertension patients. Breast cancer patients have formed over 40 times as many support groups as heart disease patients, whose condition undeniably benefits from psychosocial and behavioural change.
These patterns are of considerable significance for this part of the review. They identify a context in which peers actively seek each other out, and deciphering the reasons for this is correspondingly useful. Davison and colleagues make steps in this direction in another part of the study in which ‘judges’ with nursing, medical and public health backgrounds rated the various conditions across a number of factors, with the following results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 14: Correlates of mutual support</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Illness characteristic</strong></td>
<td><strong>Amount of support activity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health Care Salience</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause known</td>
<td>-.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient must manage</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How disabling</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costliness of treatment</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude importance</td>
<td>.40**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A terminal illness</td>
<td>.18</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Patient Characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Related to ageing</td>
<td>-.32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Woman’s illness</td>
<td>.29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friendly patients</td>
<td>-.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Burdens</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disfiguring</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassing</td>
<td>.43**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symptoms noticeable</td>
<td>-.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constitutes a stigma</td>
<td>.30</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, ‘having a illness that is embarrassing, socially stigmatising or disfiguring leads people to seek the support of others with similar conditions’. In addition, ‘aspects of illness associated with cost of treatment and loss of life were positively associated with support seeking in the city groups’. Other putative correlates of seeking self-help, such as the condition being ‘disabling’ or requiring ‘self-management’, appear not be related to group formation. There are, of course, considerable problems of inference here. Does this particular panel of judges understand these concomitants in the same way as the patients making decisions to join a support group. Clearly, some data on real choices made by real patients are apposite to this element of the review (see the next study). On the other hand, the sharp and solid differences in participation rates provide unique information on status and reference group characteristics, and it is these that merit analytic attention here.

The move from health to ill-health is, in sociological terms, a classic move from insider to outsider status. The fact that the best supported pathways are to illnesses that are embarrassing and/or socially stigmatising and/or disfiguring exacerbates the social distance involved and may reduce the utility of existing family and friendship networks. The fact that salient conditions tend to the incurable and/or life threatening means that the status shift involved is non-reversible, and that the objective of support turns to coping and resilience. Reference group support is sought in respect of coming to terms with a status rather than escaping from it. These combined social costs, together with high financial burdens, may also imply that the new identities associated with surviving AIDS, mastectomy, alcoholism and so forth become central life
statuses. This factor might also constitute further pressure towards affiliative behaviour.

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This study is a survey of participation patterns supported by a well-founded inference about those patterns. It says nothing about the efficacy of illness support groups, and it says nothing about the experience of belonging to an illness support group. It tells us simply that they attract and assemble participants with outsider status (6, and 9). But underlying that simple finding is a hugely important proposition about the gap in status (shaded squares) associated with these particular outsider gatherings. There is no associated marginality, little associated status dissonance; they are well and truly outsider positions.

**Study 4.4: Charlton G and Barrow C (2002) Coping and self-help group membership in Parkinson’s Disease: an exploratory qualitative study Health & Social Care in the Community 10(6) pp472-478**

The present small-scale, exploratory, qualitative study was conducted to investigate how Parkinson’s disease, a chronic progressive illness, had affected the lives of eight participants. It also explored whether self-help group membership was related to coping methods (four of the participants were members of the Parkinson’s Disease Society and four were not). Semi-structured interviews were conducted and the thematic analysis was used to identify and group the themes emerging from the participants’ discourse. It was found that all participants had experienced losses of physical and mental functioning and independence, self-identity and future, and were afraid of further losses. Although all participants used a range of coping methods, it was found that there were differences between members and non-members in the prominence of certain methods and overall coping style. For non-members coping centred upon maintaining a normal life and denying the condition a central role, but for group members, the disease and its likely consequences were accepted and incorporated into everyday life. The discourse of non-members contained many references to a self-help group as sources of distress, while discourse of members identified it as a supportive resource.

So begins the admirably clear abstract (reviewers notice such things!) of the final study selected for this short sequence. It is particularly useful here because it works at the boundary of those choosing and refusing to join self-help groups. It is important to remind ourselves that there is an explicit choice involved here, which the present study captures, with the usual self-selection and yea-saying in these studies being balanced with interview material from non-members about why they had not opted to join the Society. The differences in perspective can be summarised with a set of contrasting quotations, the first pair concerning a view of what the future might hold:

I have seen the future in the eyes, faces and activities of my fellow Parkinson’s sufferers who are in more advanced stages of the disease than me. I can picture myself sitting paralysed in a wheelchair unable to communicate, in pain because my back is hurting and no one knows that I need to lie down. Or
unable to watch television because no one knows they have given me the wrong spectacles and I cannot tell them. [non-member]

Some people might think we’ll do this when we’ve retired or we’ll do that next year or whatever, both my husband and I now take the view that, if there is anything we want to do, then we will do it. [member]

Two further quotations about how people compare themselves with others are of particular value in terms of understanding the importance of reference group preferences. Both the following are about the feelings generated by meetings with fellow sufferers:

Well, I don’t want to see other people who are badly disabled, but I suppose that’s an obvious one really, not many people would want to be reminded would they? [non-member]

I think about other people and how they must be feeling. There are others there who are so much worse than me, I don’t even think I’m that bad compared to some of them. It has made me feel very lucky, if anything. [member]

All the participants had been diagnosed with ‘idiopathic PD’ for over three years. Further information is provided on participants, although such a tiny study is not able to chart systematic differences. Indeed Charlton and Barrow note that ‘investigation of differences between members and non-members (of a support group for progressive neurological illness) in terms of demographic variables and knowledge of illness did not succeed in identifying why some people do not become members.’ Hence their conclusion rests at the level of acceptance and choice:

Every participant used a number of coping methods, and members and non-members often made use of the same strategies. However, important differences in coping style were seen in the present study. Overall, non-members acknowledged PD, but did not seek to adapt their lives to accommodate to it any more than was absolutely necessary. However, members not only acknowledged the disease but made adjustments in recognising it.


1 2 3
4 5 6
7 8 9

This study places important caveats on the theory developed thus far. It reminds us that status positions are always multiple and that, even with a serious illness, some individuals will choose to define their identities in other ways. This little snapshot of evidence is about how support groups may be resented and resisted, repeating a tale we came across much earlier about the quiet persuasion of the mentor being ineffectual for unwilling horses. In this case it shows that pathways from in-group (1,2,4,5,7,8) to out-group identity (3,6,9) have to be made by the potential members themselves and are not something that can be engendered from the outside.
Section 2, Block 4 summary: relationships in illness support groups

Overall, these inquiries begin to present an optimistic picture of peer support and, in particular, about the importance of a shared identity between supporter and supported (certainly as compared to the growing pessimism of investigations of youth-on-youth support). But a realist synthesis is always on the lookout for the scope conditions of success. And in this respect, I would emphasise that the jury is still out on ‘hard outcomes’ like mortality, recovery, and prevention of relapse. Inevitable, too, is the conclusion that such interventions do not work for everyone. The final study in the review echoes, in a perhaps unexpected context, a rather general finding of the review, namely that supportive fellowship will never reach the stubborn and the resistant. I also emphasise again that these interventions may not be thought of as mentoring as such, but argue that they constitute a critical case in uncovering the formula for successful support relationships.

The vital contextual difference between these studies and the other interventions reviewed here is that is that the subject is experiencing a descent into outsider status. The fact that the rhetoric and actions of support groups are often all about battling with the negative connotations of status decline and detachment does not make this description any less true in terms of a comparative classification of support relationships. A corner of the status/reference group matrix has been discovered in which shared characteristics can sometimes prove beneficial, so let us try to spell out the whys and wherefores in Figure 16.

Figure 16: Key status and identity positions in ‘illness support groups’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor Social Identity (motivation)</th>
<th>Insider (full member)</th>
<th>Marginal (provisional member)</th>
<th>Outsider (non-member)</th>
<th>Mentee Social Identity (motivation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>advocate (proselytiser)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>aspirational (candidature)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>autonomous (laissez faire)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>acquiescence (resilience)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antipathy (obstructionist)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>antagonism (resistance)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figure is composed, as before, of the typical mentor and mentee positions, with both the tiled and striped boxes being located in the outsider category, marking the sharing of a particular health/disability status. Successful and unsuccessful trajectories are once again marked. So how are they configured?
Relationships in illness support groups

- Our refined theory states that adjusting and coping with significant status decline is often supported better by someone with personal knowledge and experience of that status than by insiders (professionals) with public and scientific knowledge of the position. The fact that the potential mentor/supporter will (by definition) have travelled the same pathway into illness and disability also corroborates a rather well-worn thesis on the importance of having-been-there-and-done-that (regardless, it seems, of what the ‘that’ turns out to have been). Support is more likely to be sought if outsider status marks a life-changing and inescapable shift, associated with stigma and isolation. Though I have not attempted to depict it (additional shaded squares would be an embellishment too far), a somewhat impermeable barrier back into insider status seems a vital prerequisite for the very formation of such programmes.

- Acceptance of this newly acquired status also seems key in seeking self-help, but this does not amount to resignation to ‘second class citizenship’. Part of the value of mutual support stems from resisting and challenging the devalued status. What the support groups offer, on the basis of shared identity, is the familiar package of collegiality and fortitude. Emotional support and encouragement of self-reliance remain the trump cards of same-status partnerships. This helps us to locate the reference group position of the mentor/support group on the matrix. By and large they are not in the business of offering escape, rebound, or remission but are all about consolidating an identity (and so are placed in boxes 6 and 9).

- Not all isolated, disabled, stigmatised, disfigured, or even dying patients seek or benefit from peer/mutual support, however. The converse of the acceptance of a new status is, of course, denial. Any individual’s status position will always be many and varied, and resisting a decline in health status may be managed by clinging that much harder to other positions. For those in such a predicament there is little evidence that support groups would be coveted or cherished. This scenario is depicted in our unsuccessful pathways, there being no evidence that illness support groups provide solace for 1s, 2s, 4s, 5s, 7s and 8s who just ‘don’t want to be reminded’.

Conclusion

As Samuel Butler, put it: ‘Life is the art of drawing sufficient conclusions from insufficient premises’. The art of systematic review, it seems, is not much different. This study is selective in the questions put, selective in placing limits on the search for relevant primary research, selective in the retrieval of documents, selective by dint of the capacity to read those documents, selective in focusing only on aspects of the primary research that are relevant to the review hypotheses, selective in making judgements about the quality of research in relation to these hypotheses, selective in producing précis of the relevant evidence, selective in creating an analytic framework, and selective in deciding upon which of its propositions to build.
A long methodological tale waits to be told about these steps. Departing from the usual rule of relegating these points to footnotes in this paper, two are selected for discussion here. The first is that these murderous levels of choice and compression apply to all methods of research synthesis (although it is often denied). The second is about the need for transparency in setting out the points of selection and the grounds for the choice. Openness and thoroughness on this score are sometimes regarded as the key differences between a ‘review’ and a ‘systematic review’. Most of the procedural detritus of this review is excluded here; my computer and my office have been left to bear their scars. I have chosen to omit a list of ‘studies obtained but not used’ and such like for two reasons. This first is simply to avoid overburdening me, my editor and the reader with huge and only tangentially useful appendices. The second and key justification is that it is simply impossible to log the dozens of decisions made daily in conducting a review. It is reasonably easy to keep a record of studies identified, located, retrieved and read, but there are layers of decisions underneath this filter that can never be fully articulated.

Faced with so many documents, guesses have to be made on relevance by title, hunches have to be backed on how much effort should go into the retrieval of hard-to-obtain grey literature, judgements have to be made about the repetition and reiteration of studies in our ‘publish or perish’ research culture, memory has to be trusted on whether a seam of papers has already been fully mined. Realist synthesis acknowledges that each report confronted will be a curate’s egg and that the good parts are worth tracking down. Above all the ‘reading’ of each piece is made with a set of review hypotheses in mind. Thus, when it comes to the page by page perusal of the documents, judgement (as well, unfortunately, as boredom, exhaustion, and irritation) litters the trail. It is therefore impossible to describe fully how research quarts are squeezed into review pint pots and Polanyi’s (1973) remonstrations about the significance of tacit knowledge are as true of this as of any area of scientific investigation. This is not to deny the importance of trying to be transparent. And on this score, realist synthesis does have one significant advantage. In this approach, procedural uniformity gives way to inference and analysis and, whatever else lies beneath the surface, the reasoning behind these conclusions is clearly on view.

Inevitably, of course, the final inferences, conclusions and recommendations are also selective. So what sufficient conclusions can be made from the substantial, but inevitably insufficient, premises drawn together here?

Let me first issue a reminder about the strategy of this explanatory review. The focus is on mentoring relations and on what makes them tick. In particular, the review has picked over research on the respective status and motivations of mentor and mentee, and on the interactions that flow between them. The review of youth mentoring schemes allows for a careful dissection of the internal mechanisms at work in building a working partnership in this particular context, probably the most taxing in which mentoring has to operate. And then by shifting to three quite different contexts, namely youth peer education, workplace mentoring and illness support, the objective is to discern which aspects of the relationships hold good and which tend to be modified under a different set of circumstances and aims.

I repeat, at the risk of inducing a queasy case of ad nauseam, that the purpose of these manoeuvres is not to produce one, two, three or four instant verdicts for decision
makers. As shown, the evidence on efficacy is always mixed. Hence, the purpose of drilling down to the mechanisms and then roving across the contexts of mentoring is to provide an explanation of why partnerships sometimes click and sometimes flop. Social science explanation is extended by refining theories, and so the conclusions of this report come in the form of the modification and fine-tuning of the original hypotheses that commenced the review (Box 1, p13). The form of the synthesis, or the nature of knowledge cumulation, is thus to explicate, spell out and make further sense of these formative ideas. This sense-making is a continual process; it occurs study-by-study during the review. An inference that is drawn on the basis of one piece of evidence is checked out against a second, often found wanting, and a revised explanation is put together. This in turn is forwarded to the next case study, and so on. Part of the test of this sense-making approach, of course, is whether the theory-building has made sense to the reader and, above all, to the prospective end-user.

This final step into utilisation requires an additional tweak, namely ‘bringing it all together’. There is now a large literature on the presentation of reviews and on partnership-building with users in order to make the end product more palatable and useful (e.g. Nutley et al, 2003; Whitehead et al, 2004). Here, I rest content with illustrations of two different styles of imparting the totality of findings, which are consonant with the realist approach:

1. A ‘model’ addressing key components that should be established in programme implementation
2. A ‘reconsideration’ of the initial hypotheses to establish the basic principles of programme building

**Review presentation 1: using a model**

The first approach has been employed in some interim conclusions reached several sections earlier in Figure 10 (p43) on pathways to youth mentoring. I will not reiterate the substance of these conclusions here, other than to stress their intended mode of application. One reviews past programmes in order to inform the construction of fresh initiatives and services. Figure 10 and its accompanying text can be considered as a blueprint for what needs to be put in place, a guide to practitioner training, a proposal for targeting interventions, an indication of the need for ancillary support in youth mentoring.

For instance, suppose a decision is made to use mentoring in a programme for truly disengaged youth, then Figure 10 describes the hard ride to be expected as well as the manoeuvres to be put into place if it is to have any chance of success. Let us imagine a training session on such a programme, and the initial rallying cry to would-be mentors. It might be useful to refer back to Figure 10 in following though this bit of boxed text which amounts, perhaps, to the world’s first evidence based pep-talk:

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30 Note that the initial conjectures here are not positivistic-style hypotheses that ‘such and such a relationship will exist and be statistically significant’, and which are tested against the null hypothesis. The hypotheses here are explanatory in their initial formulation. They are neither confirmed nor refuted in the synthesis, but always refined.
Welcome to your toughest ever challenge. What we’ll attempt to do in this session is to teach you to play ‘snakes and ladders’, to help you anticipate the ups and downs of our mentoring scheme. Don’t expect too many of your charges to make it to the winning square, but please appreciate that surviving at least some of the steps on the way will still be worthwhile.

Expect your relationship to uncoil very slowly. Try to begin with the basic elements of befriending – be a good companion. Start unambitiously by establishing and building upon mutual interests before moving on to the consideration of alternative futures and the means of striving towards them. Build these further plans with caution because we do need to affirm that, as sure as eggs are eggs, your mentee will not stick to the script: s/he will let you down and the partnership will tend to crack. For you both to continue in the programme, you should anticipate having to build and rebuild trust continually. The problems that got your mentees into their present predicaments are still likely to be present, and so your next main aim is that of building up resilience in the face of life’s continual knocks.

To get to some sort of equilibrium at this stage will be achievement indeed, but you will find that any further progress is impossible unless other agents and agencies are drawn into the orbit of your partnership. You may have accepted this challenge because of your ability to get on with young people. Success at a one-to-one level ultimately depends, however, on the many-to-many. So called ‘engagement mentoring’ is just that, and depends on your ability to know and show the ropes through family and peer ties, into channels of community support and on to education, training and career opportunities.

Don’t worry. We appreciate that, at some point in this sequence, your capacity to help and direct your mentee through the appropriate networks will become exhausted. At this point, especially, you should call on the assistance of the programme co-ordinator who will make use of our formal liaisons with allied youth and career schemes. [Here, our pep-talk takes for granted another lesson learned in the review, namely that the new voluntarism needs to be firmly anchored in old-style service provision.]

Don’t imagine, however, that you hand over responsibility at this point. Volatility does not disappear overnight. You should expect a further round of trust-building, and a further role in fence-mending as your mentee’s spleen is vented, and sometimes justifiably so, against this new set of authority figures.

Clearly the model in Figure 10 can also be applied to somewhat wider objectives, such as planning and co-ordinating responsibilities in multi-agency youth work. I am thinking here of schemes such as the UK Connexions initiative, which aims to draw together practitioners from youth work, and the Careers Service in the guise of a Personal Advisor performing something like a mentoring role. Clearly such an innovative admixture brings together some of the requisite and very diverse functions described in the model. But what might be questioned is whether the practitioner function so created allows for the time, tools or temperament to engage in the painstaking process of befriending, fire-fighting and reliance-building that lies at the base of the model (recall the discussion of the special circumstances permitting ‘professional friendship’ in study 1.3 on pp20-22).
Review presentation 2: reconsidering the hypotheses

A second mode of addressing conclusions and recommendations in realist synthesis is to return to the body of theories or hypotheses with which the review commenced. How have they withstood the onslaught of evidence? What should be achieved in this process is a better articulation of basic programme theory, and this sort of synthesis may be useful in the basic, formative stages of programme architecture. It may help in the decision about where and where not to deploy a mentoring scheme, and thus when to and when not to follow a current fashion. The overall aim is to assist implementation by giving a gauge of the strengths and weaknesses of a whole class of programmes: in other words to provide a capsule set of statements on what works for whom in what circumstances and in what respects. In the following illustration, I return to the first nine hypotheses in Box 1 on p13 (the remaining five ‘long-move’ hypotheses having already been pummelled in the conclusions on youth mentoring). The original propositions are set down here, together with summary accounts (in boxes) of where the review has left them.

1 and 2. Successful mentoring relationships have to supply the apposite range, sequence and balance of change mechanisms to match the intended shift in the mentee’s standing and thinking. Unsuccessful relationships follow from the application of inappropriate or inadequate or ill-timed mechanisms.

These were introduced as the most general of the conjectures leading this inquiry, and the second is merely the converse of the first. At this level of abstraction, they are almost truisms and not open to any straightforward corroboration or refutation. They do suggest, however, the importance of distinguishing the variety of functions that mentoring can perform, and by this I do not mean the variety of spheres of operation (drug education, workplace mentoring and HIV/AIDS support etc.). Rather, the comparative exercise here produces powerful evidence to show, for instance, that both youth peer education schemes and illness support groups operate best at the level of resilience-building. Both of them catch the mentee at a moment of doubt and hesitation, and their optimal function is to help mentees to stand firm. By contrast, using youth peer mentors or self-help groups to pursue redemptive agendas is seen to be highly problematic. These points of leverage change markedly in, say, the supervisor-to-staff relationship in the workplace even though it too is pursued under the name of mentoring. The strengths of corporate mentoring lie in passing on tricks of the trade and in developing opportunities, as well as the eye for them. Although such major patterns and distinctions are evident, this is not to say that there is a simple recipe for providing particular functions to particular mentees. Thus, for instance, traditional adult to youth mentoring often also aspires to positional advance, but many studies show that resilience-building may be a more feasible aim. The key truth and the real upshot of these initial conjectures is that policy architects need to be quite clear about the objectives of a mentoring programme. Personal solace and positional advance are nurtured by quite different styles of mentoring.
3. The mentor’s status and reference group identity will restrict the resources that s/he is able to bring to the relationship and thus limit his or her ‘reach’ across the entire matrix of mentee positions.

This proposition turns out to be well supported, perhaps not surprisingly as it is a version of the old adage that it is impossible to be all things to all persons. Mentors are somewhat scarce resources, and they and their organisational support tend to pick and choose protégés. Formal company schemes appear to make little headway if the opportunities for consultation are regimented by the senior member’s working day, and they tend to work best if the mentor gets to choose his or her protégé. Adult volunteers in youth mentoring often operate best from non-establishment positions but if they do so, they will lack coaching and careers expertise. Supplementary professional support almost always has to be dovetailed into such schemes. Conversely, if professional youth and careers workers are thrust into a mentoring role, the opportunities for close informal contact are slim. Young peer educators are good at making relationships and building alliances with fellow peers, but not that good at educating insofar as this involves an element of formal instruction. In all of these situations mentors are likely to prefer the line of least resistance and will tend to hand-pick their mentees. The policy implication is clear – mentors cannot be overburdened with tasks beyond their ken and capability.

4. The mentee’s status and reference group identity will restrict his or her potential to respond to resources offered from certain status and reference group positions.

This rule turns out to be well founded, and signals an ineluctable limit to mentoring programmes. By and large, entry into such programmes is voluntary and the evidence shows that it is by no means the case that everyone lines up to be mentored. Many young people remain untouched by the best known North American mentoring schemes, and recruitment difficulties relate to (de)motivation just as much as they do to levels of deprivation. And even when they make it into a scheme, progress can be overwhelmed by a toxic mix of continuing disadvantage and further delinquency that no amount of adult attention can overturn. Such subjects may prefer the support of peers, especially as compared to the official and the ‘scientific’, although the nature of that support is, of course, quite different. By contrast, hesitation in becoming a mentee is less of a problem in illness support where there is more activity the more stigmatising the condition. Nevertheless, there is strong evidence that reference group identity is all-important in this domain in that there is hostility to such groups amongst the considerable numbers of the seriously ill who do not want to be reminded of their condition. In company mentoring too, there are strong indications that tougher targets do not always come forward, and that schemes are kept busy with the softer ones.
5. The mentor’s status and reference group should correspond to the intended destination of the mentee; mentors should embody the intended change.

This is the weakest of the initial conjectures in the sense that it is overstated. Clearly, it has a solid element of truth in that mentoring operates across groups, with those in the know advising those who do not. Thus in illness support groups, recent cancer sufferers will enlist the support of cancer survivors, and those getting to grips with embarrassing and disfiguring conditions are more likely to seek out the help of those who are already stigmatised. Moving in the opposite direction, those seeking to break through the corporate ceiling tend to favour senior mentors rather than one-step-above partnerships. But the hypothesis doesn’t deal with multiple mentoring functions and multiple status conditions. So, for instance, a youth mentor may try to befriend and coach, but this does not mean that s/he has simultaneously to be a sixteen-year-old on the street corner and the local college lecturer in IT. What the evidence indicates is that in trying to span so many functions the mid-field, the laissez-faire and somewhat marginal mentor is probably the best placed. Mentees also come in a variety of status shapes and sizes. They are junior employees or disengaged youth but they also have other group loyalties by dint of class, gender, race, ability, disability, locality and so on. There is little evidence that a wholesale matching on such characteristics is necessary to successful relationships. Same-race partnerships in youth mentoring, for instance, may give the relationship a kick-start in the friendship stakes, but provide neither advantage nor disadvantage in terms of educational and occupational gains. Mentors do not have to be made in terms of some ideal image of who the mentee wants to become (some elements of shared autobiography, however, do come in handy – see hypothesis 9).

6. Pairings that deliver well on one mentoring mechanism are often weak on another, e.g. a good match on emotional grounds may not be able to promote positional shifts.

This proposition is also overstated in this crude form. It is correct insofar as all the schemes under review have their strengths and weaknesses in respect of different outputs and outcomes. Thus there is a tonnage of evidence about the strength of youth mentoring at the level of befriending, but the findings become ambiguous when it comes to educational and training gains. Likewise, illness support groups function well in respect of ‘quality of life’ and ‘psychological adjustment’ but the jury is still out on ‘survival’, ‘recurrence’, ‘immunological improvement’ and so on. However, the conjecture is wrong to the extent that all successful partnerships (of which there are plenty) manage to combine and indeed require some overlap of functions. Even in the top drawer of corporate mentoring when the significantly powerful commune with highly motivated, the studies above indicate that such partnerships falter without a base in rapport, trust and mutual affinity.
7. The more status and reference group origins and destinations are catered for by the single programme, the less is it likely to accommodate and phase in the requisite pathways to change.

This hypothesis has not been examined in a great deal of detail, but there are indications of its power. Some of the longstanding and most successful youth mentoring programmes seem to have maintained their success by narrowing the range of their clientele at recruitment. Those workplace mentors who are able to provide both psychosocial and career support tend to bestow these favours selectively on a hand-picked group. Quite basic differences such as the extent of prior drug usage for those entering a drug education programme seem to affect which messages and which messengers gain credibility. The precise degree of development of a disease like Parkinson’s seems to influence whether a sufferer will resent or consent to membership of a support group. Youth peer mentors dislike and perform poorly in an instructor role, and prefer to tailor their ideas and latch onto ‘the receptive’. Against the current fashion of rolling social support together in localities and services, the general wash of evidence here suggests than mentoring works best when specifically targeted and, somewhat more gloomily, when the targets are relatively soft.

8. Exactly corresponding mentor and mentee grid positioning (true peers) results in a null move. Peer support operates within status bands and can only accommodate a change in reference group identity.

There is good evidence to support this. Peer sex education has little strength in informing young people how to consort in the future, but is better at sustaining conservative (small c) norms and values. Illness support groups are not in the business of providing denial of status or escape from status, but are more likely to promote adjustment to status, solace with status, and even struggle on the basis of status. Workers look to colleagues as the main source of job satisfaction, but not job prospects. Nevertheless, the original proposition has somewhat negative connotations, perhaps because shared identity was once seen as a key mobilising force for change in and of itself. But peers are as likely to be the poison as the remedy. Thus peer support tends to work at the level of loyalties and attitudes rather than positional shifts and resource re-allocations. However, under the constant threat of external controls and change, the wherewithal to make people feel more comfortable with an existing disposition (a null move) is not a hollow aim of public policy. If the heart of intervention is about resilience-building, about raising the ability to defend a corner, then the evidence shows that peers are to be prized as mentors.
9. The mentor’s ability to deliver appropriate resources is not only conditioned by his or her present status and reference group positions, but also by previous experience (or trajectory). It may be beneficial to have proceeded the mentee along the intended pathway.

This is perhaps the only enduring generalisation, the only golden rule of this review. Whatever the policy setting (drug education, illness support, career advancement) and whatever the objective (AIDS/HIV awareness, surviving mergers, coping with Parkinson’s Disease) and whatever their current positions (board member, voluntary helper, welfare professional), the evidence indicates that it pays to use mentors who have ‘been there and done that’. There is little data to support the idea of the pulling power of the distant, iconic role model, and much more to suggest that mentoring’s essence occurs when the experienced hand demonstrates that a mentee is not alone in his or her current predicament. Experiences share well, especially if they are bittersweet. For the policy architect and programme builder, however, this rule presents an awful dilemma for it may indicate that ideal practitioners will be in short supply. The deeper the holes of life that mentoring seeks to address, the scarcer will be those who have managed to escape and are willing and able to help the newly entombed.

These conclusions, together with the sub-sectional summaries, represent an attempt to get to grips with the evidence base on mentoring relationships. They have been arrived at by a process of theory testing and refinement. They provide some realistic expectations about what mentoring may and may not be expected to achieve. As such, they might be called the truths of mentoring interventions, remembering as Wilde once said that ‘truth is rarely pure and never simple’. And since he had practically the first word in this essay, we will let him have the last.
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