Review Article

Developing Bonds: An Exploration of the Development of Bonds between Mentors and Young People

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ABSTRACT: The paper describes a piece of research exploring young people's experience of a mentoring relationship in the context of a service (PROMISE). The scheme has been developed to offer vulnerable young children a supportive relationship to assist their lives. Previous research has indicated that they found the long-term weekly meetings with a voluntary mentor to be beneficial. In particular they indicated that the mentors provide a supportive relationship which helped them cope and were of benefit to their sense of self-worth and identity. This paper explores in further detail the nature of this relationship, including how it develops in the context of mentoring. The findings are considered within the framework of attachment and social constructionist theories. Implications for similar mentoring programmes are discussed alongside wider implications for assisting this group of young people.

Keywords: mentor, vulnerable children, attachment security, evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

Mentoring has been applied and found to be effective in a variety of contexts, such as education, psychotherapy, forensic and counselling. Despite evidence in support of the effectiveness of mentoring [1,2] there is surprisingly little in the way of theory or research to guide its application and inspire its future development. Some studies focus on conditions that may facilitate positive mentoring relationships [3,4]. Such research has often concentrated on evaluation and outcome: whether it works rather than on an exploration of the process of how it works. We have conducted a previous study of its application in a social care context (PROMISE) assisting young people who are risk to themselves or others [5]. The findings indicated that the relationship between the mentor and the young person was a primary positive factor. Specifically, in our previous study the children mentioned a sense of being valued and appreciated by their mentors. Important to this was an awareness of being held in mind by their mentors, such that even when they were not with them they felt that mentors were thinking and caring about them. This internalisation of their relationship with their mentors included being able to imagine how the mentor might advise and guide them at moments where they felt unsure about how to act. They also mentioned that the relationship was fostered by positive actions, such as spending time with them in meaningful activities and sharing and promoting their interests "spoke louder than words". Engaging in pleasant, interesting, fun and hence memorable activities assisted in the process of the relationship with the mentor becoming internalised and generating positive feelings when they thought about their mentor.

These findings have been supported by a number of studies for example; Renick and Thomson (2010) found that the quality of the mentor-youth bond significantly predicted youths' relationships at 8 and 16 months. Likewise, Clayden and Stein (2005) argued that when mentors were less connected to their mentee-youths, this could contribute towards a premature ending of the relationship. Dubois and Neville (1997) identified that more contact led to greater closeness and greater benefits, suggesting that the relationship created the opportunity for change rather than these being due to specific events. Agued relative to controls, youths who perceived their relationship as providing activities, structure and unconditional support derived the largest benefits from the relationship [6]. There has been some indication that the benefits of mentoring are reciprocal. Mech, Pryde and Rycroft (1995) found that the mentors believed themselves to benefit as much as the young person in the relationship. This led Thompson and Zand (2010) to argue that data collected from both mentor and mentee together would help determine convergence between the mentor and mentee report and the relative contribution of each's perspective to the quality of the relationship.

Attachment theory has been employed to consider the development of the mentoring relationship and alliance [7]. Showed that the negative experiences of fostered children prevented them from establishing a close relationship with mentors [8]. They argued that their internal representations led to biased interpretations of social stimuli leading them to exhibit dependence or hostility towards the mentors when they were distressed. In contrast, more securely attached children were easily comforted when distressed and were more co-operative in interpersonal relationships [9]. A core assumption of the mentoring intervention is that developing a caring and close relationship cultivates protective factors and places the youth on a positive developmental trajectory.

However, the mechanism through which mentoring exerts its influence remains unclear [10]. One theory is that the mentor served as a secure secondary attachment figure which enabled the competency in other relationships [11]. Thomson and Zand (2010) conducted a survey of 205 mentored children exploring the nature of the bond and its relationship to other relationship-based outcomes. They found that the quality of the mentor youth relationship predicted other socio-emotional development including relationship-based outcomes such as friendship with and self-disclosure to other adults at 8 and 16 months. Likewise, [12] argued a positive alliance was associated with more positive family bonding, relationships with adults, and relationships at school and life skills. Alternatively, relational theorists have suggested interaction and positive emotional experiences become internalised, altering internal attachment models. For example, internal models are modified in a more positive way [13] and mentoring may alter the youth's perception of their interpersonal relationships with other peers, adults and teachers [10].

But while these proposals describe the strength of the relationship between different factors they are not sensitive enough to explore how mentoring impacts on the children's ability to trust in the relationship and thereby illuminate the mechanisms in play. Dallos and Comley-Ross (2004) found that when absent, mentees felt mentors held them in mind, in that they perceived their mentors to still think of them and care for their wellbeing. Dallos et al. (2019) conducted a longitudinal study with Mentees and found without exception that they found the mentoring experience extremely

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beneficial. The relationship was explored in terms of how it developed, and evidence supported a process of internalisation and evidenced ways that the relationship facilitated more constructive attachment thoughts and behaviours about the mentor-mentee relationship. It was also shown that children's previous trauma intrusions were less frequent after the relationship had established. These children appeared to have internalised how the mentor might advise and emotionally guide them when they were not present, and this insight suggested a possible mechanism, suggesting this process is worthy of more extensive evaluation.

AIMS OF THE STUDY

The current study aimed to explore children's ability to trust in the mentoring relationship through their conversation and social behaviour.

The broad aims were to explore the experiences of a group of young people taking part in the Promise mentoring scheme who were developing a relationship with a Mentor. Since the scheme is based in an attachment theory framework we wanted to both hear how the relationship was experienced but also to observe how the sense of security was jointly constructed through talk and action. The specific aims of the study were to:

(i) Explore the themes that mentors, and mentees jointly articulated about their experience of mentoring and their relationship

(ii) Observe how the young people and their mentors interacted during their discussion. Specifically, we were interested in how open the discussions were and the balance of the contributions between them.

(iii) To explore the similarity in attachment style of the dyad

By observing joint interviews with well-established dyads of Mentor and Mentee, the bond between them should help illuminate its attachment style and processes. The nature of the interaction between them is important because a well-established relationship has two-way processes and the bond exists between them as well as within them. No studies have yet explored this, but one study of the context of relationships between foster carers and fostered children [14], found that in joint conversations, foster carers could take over and talk for the young person in their care. One specific way they did this was to make assumptions about what the young person was thinking and feeling and a consequence of this typically was that the young person became increasingly silenced.

Ethical approval was given by the local University where the authors were employed.

METHOD

Participants

In the joint interviews, the six mentees in the sample were an average of 19.3 years old an age range of 15-23 years. All of the mentors had been involved with the scheme for over two years and had mentored more than two young people. Their relationship had lasted between 2-6 years. One of the joint interviews was retrospective in that the mentoring relationship had formally ended but the mentor and mentee were still in contact. Sampling was opportunistic in terms of inviting well established dyads who were available and had been in their mentoring relationship for over 2 years. All of six pairs approached agreed to take part. Both Mentor and Mentee were given information about the study and gave verbal informed consent themselves and where under 16 years this was also given by their family or social worker. All excerpts reported are anonymised.

The interview was conducted with the Mentee and Mentor together and followed a set of prompts: First impressions of each other, experience of mentoring, how the relationship developed, challenges, changes in the relationship, benefits of the mentoring, views of their future relationship. Then the relationship questionnaire was completed by the mentee (and if joint by the mentor also). They were also free to discuss anything else they felt was relevant.

The Relationship Questionnaire [15].

Mentee and Mentor completed this questionnaire as a measure of the similarity between the couples in their attachment security and the similarity between them and self-perceived in style.

Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in a local community center by one of the first two authors. After, both Mentor and Mentee completed and attachment measure the Relationship Questionnaire [15]. Each face to face meeting lasted about 75 minutes..

ANALYSIS

The joint interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim (Y=Young person, M=Mentor, I=Interviewer). The analysis was in two parts: The first was a thematic analysis [16]. All of the interviews were coded, then indications of the process through which the bond was expressed were summarised as a set of themes. A shared analysis of three transcripts was conducted to gain inter-rater reliability. Interpretations were well calibrated and there were no substantial disagreements in the themes that emerged, but the theme labels could differ and were discussed to produce agreed theme titles.

The second was an observational analysis of the process of their conversation which employed a conversational analysis approach which was developed by Veroff et al. (1993) and [17]. Conversations were analysed using a coding system consisting of the following typology of contributions to an interaction, collaboration; conflict; confirmation; laughter; continuation; non-response. We have elaborated this system in adding a category capturing what might be called 'meta' conversational process which constituted a form of speaking for the other. This was exemplified by the use of two types of questions: The first, we have termed imputation questions; a question which effectively implied the answer, typically by assuming what the other person thought or felt. These also had the quality of closed or rhetorical questions. The other style of questioning we have termed, invitational questions; a question which was open ended and expressed a wish to know how the other person thought or felt and invited a contribution to the conversation [14]. In our view these relate to openness and the ability to empathetically consider and hold each other in mind which are seen to be an important feature of building secure attachment [18,19].

FINDINGS

The findings from the Relationship Questionnaire [15] are shown below

Table 1 show that all of the mentors indicated secure attachment patterns with one sowing some complex attachment orientations. In contrast all of the children indicated anxious attachment patterns emotional neediness or dismissal of their attachment needs. The children also revealed complex organisations with a preference for more than one style in 4/6 cases, suggesting their attachment orientation was more disorganised in nature. This was consistent with our previous research study [20] which indicated that the children progressing from complex disorganised attachment orientations to a more stable pattern of self-reliance (disinterest in the Bartholomew and Horowitz framework)

	Dyad 1	Dyad 2	Dyad 3	Dyad 4	Dyad 5	Dyad 6
Mentor	Secure	Secure	Secure	Secure	Secure	Secure and disorganised
YP	Needy	Secure+ disinterested	Secure, disinterested and needy	Needy and disinterested	Needy	Secure and disorganised

Table 1: Relationship orientation self-perception between mentor and mentee.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Overall the interviews between mentor and mentee all indicated a sense of warmth, humour, mutual respect and caring in their relationships and it was apparent that the relationship between them was experienced as mutually safe and supportive. An overall Meta theme that captured this was that of trust and stability. This included a number of other themes, such as a positive emotional tone to the relationship, having fun and feeling that they understood and respected each other. Inherent in this overall theme was also a view of the relationship as continuing rather than transient and more than a 'professional' relationship'. In effect the mentors and mentees felt that they had become like friends or a form of extended family. A schematic representation of the themes is offered in Figure 1 showing how Trust and Stability embraced a range of sub themes.

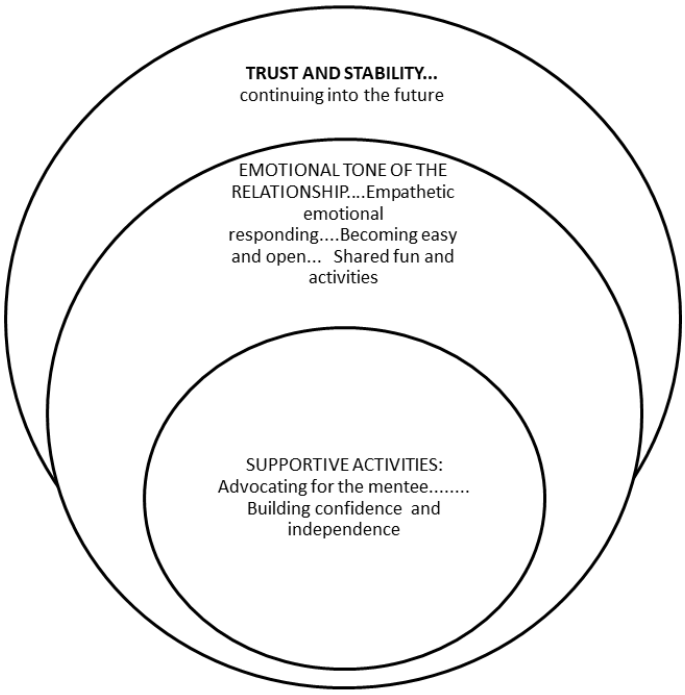

Figure 1) Themes encapsulating the nature of the mentor-mentee relationship.

Trust and Stability

This was the dominant over-arching theme that captured the sense of the mentee feeling that the mentor understands then and being confident that the mentor would be available when they needed them, would be able to meet their emotional needs, and to provide support for them when times were difficult. There was a thread through this that the mentor was experienced as viewing the mentee now not as a young person but as having had difficult life experiences and as still having some vulnerabilities. Having dealt with a range of challenges and difficulties now meant that the mentee was confident that they could rely on the mentor

YP: With me personally, like er, if I'm expecting to meet someone or something I'd be like, I'd start getting ready or whatever, now I always get ready sooner than I have to be, and I'm just sat around waiting. So as soon as it's like, I'm meant to be meeting someone I'm like oh I wonder where they are. Do I still have to be waiting around here?

M: But I think that is a big difference, it's exactly what [YP] said, we know each other so much better now...and you know, I mean [YP] knows if I said I'll be there about 10.15 that I will be there within a minute or two of 10.15. He knows that and equally [.] [YP] was somewhat unreliable at times when we started, I think that's fair to say And

YP: Oh um, [.] I don't know really. Most of the people I know already know [M] and I can't really remember how I first described him, but he's a friend and a mentor. He started out as my, as a mentor that I was given through leaving care and um, you know, that hasn't stopped, and at the same time it's kind of more than that now... We ain't breaking ice, you know what I mean?

Empathic Emotional Reponses

This captured the concept of the mentor as emotionally supportive about the issues that the young person faced in life. However, both mentor and mentee shared their personal life experiences quite openly and cared about the wellbeing of each other. They understand what the other is experiencing emotionally and try to say things and do things that were supportive and encouraging.

M: We've talked about so many things. I think um, I think probably family stuff really isn't it? We've talked a lot about family stuff really, my family, your family, how it all fits together and er, who we can rely on for different things. Things are absolutely useless in one way but completely supportive in another, that sort of thing. Um, [.] and I think certainly it's good for normalising things, she might have been a little bit, you know difficult before for YP. And handling family relationships and those sort of things. Those sort of things stick out for me. Both our sides really. Yeah

YP: Umm [nodding]

M: So all these, all these relationships that I have and the emotional ties that I have with those. Elements of those are all there but because they are from so many different directions I think that is why the mentoring works because you're taking, unconsciously, little bits of other relationships that you've had and building this other relationship.

YP: All wrapped up into one.

Becoming easy and open with each other, they expressed the importance of a relaxed emotional tone, where they each respected the other, liked them and felt comfortable in their presence and in the relationship. The young person clearly felt confident in the relationship, and able to make a useful contribution to its quality. It was also noteworthy that disagreement, which barely existed, tended to be short-lived and non-personal.

YP: I'll probably ring her up and say "can I come and stay" and she'll be yes of course you can, and she' ll be at work and I'll just bimble on over down on the train or something and don't know, just chill out.

M: Yeah. Cause I think... you can relax at ours can't you?

YP: Yeah, that's exactly it.

Shared Fun and Activities

They described that they had done many things together that were fun and/or practical or both which they had both contributed to and defined. These provided memorable occasions which they had both enjoyed and found constructive. Importantly, their shared sense of humour was abundantly expressed when reliving memories of these activities. This was quite unlike professional relationships the child liked as it was more personal in nature.

M: and we got into a little routine sort of quite quickly ... um, there was quite a bit of child labour, in there as well wasn't there? He helped me decorate and gardening and all that sort of stuff. Cause you can have a conversation with a paint brush in your hand can't you, so? Yeah.

YP: It's like she'd have me in ball and chains.

M: Yeah.

YP: It's really hard to explain, really hard to explain. I find it impossible. They're like so who's [M], just like, oh my God, it's not social services it's a mentor. They're like "what's a mentor?" I'm like "oh for God's sake", "I give up" like. Once I sounded really stupid when I tried to explain it. It was so funny though with my mate.

Acting as an Advocate for the Mentee

This captured the theme of the mentor helping to facilitate the interests of the young person in education, work, housing, health, and other matters of life importance by offering practical help. The mentor listened to the young person, validated their thoughts, acted in their best interests and helped them express their wishes and needs to others.

I: What did you do and what did you talk about [the last time you met]?

YP: That was this, last week weren't it? This week? This week. Yeah.

M: Yeah.

YP: Um, talked about [.] job centre, cause I had to go and obviously sign on.

I: Right.

YP: Which she helped with. I talked about housing. She helped me fill out the application form. Um.

And

M: I did have to have a bit of a straight talk with [YP] once or twice about what she would need to do to make some changes. Um, before somebody else would take charge. And I knew YP didn't want anyone else to take charge of her condition or her future... Because everyone had been kind of [.] treading on eggs shells really a bit, and I think [YP] knew that there were things that people weren't saying, which wasn't very honest, was it? really at the time

I: Right. So you think that being honest and straight forward was something that she found helpful.

M: Yes, If [YP] had been a little girl that might have been different.

YP: Yes, I asked MN to speak for me at a meeting, or several meetings there were at the hospital. She was helpful.

Importance of Building Confidence and Independence

This theme captured the idea of the mentor as having faith in the young person's character and thought processes, and helps them feel confidence in what is meaningful to them, as individuals. They are a stable an non-judgemental safe base. But they also cultivate independence and so the young person does not feel dependent on the mentor when they are apart. The young person is also given a valid role in the contribution to the relationship, which cultivates confidence.

YP: Found out my girlfriend was pregnant so, we talked about quite a lot didn't we? Um, I think that's probably the most significant, not problem, but the most recent event that we've had lots of chats about.

[And later **in** the interview]

YP: It's been, been on and off for a few weeks Um...

M: But he still wants to be involved with the baby.

YP: Yeah, I still want to be involved with the baby.

M: So that will be interesting, but hopefully things are back on the up again, aren't they, so?

YP: Hopefully, it's going to stay this way this time because obviously every time I've got, for the last 7 years, every time I've got something sorted, something drastic has happened.

M: Well it does, yeah it does go like this doesn't it, but you know, I had a a an amazing parents and a great upbringing and my late teens were pretty shocking so it's, it's part of being a young adult isn't it..

Continuing into the Future

This was a theme of the relationship as something they wanted to continue into the future and for two of the pairs this was evident in the fact that they were still in contact despite the mentoring relationship having formally ended when the YP was aged 18. The wish for continuing contact was mutual although they both understood the though amount of contact between them would change, the bond between them will continue to exist.

Mentor: "it's been a sort of relationship that's kind of become a friendship and it's just sort of run and run and run.

YP: I hope to get a nice little job and actually ring [M] up for once and say "come down, I want to take you out of dinner", or something like that, you know what I mean, that's what I want to do.

I: Ok that's nice.

YP: Obviously, I know she don't, I know I don't owe her anything, but I feel like I owe her everything.

CONVERSATIONAL PROCESSES

We were also interested in not just what was said but the process of their conversation and what this revealed about their relationship. A sense of safety is communicated both at verbal and non-verbal levels, in particular the extent to which there is open communication in a relationship [14,21]. We utilised a typology of contributions to an interaction derived from Clarkson and Dallos [14,22]. This consists of positive and constructive communicational types-(collaboration; conflict; confirmation; laughter; continuation as opposed to more negative or disengaged communications including negative aspects of these and also non-response). In addition we have developed what we term Meta conversational processes, namely imputation questions and invitational questions to further indicate how they express openness and the ability to empathetically hold each other in mind.

The broadest and most telling aspect of their conversations was that there was little indication of negative communications and equality in their contributions. Put simply the young people talked, and the mentors were clearly able to adopt a calm and non-intrusive role in which they did not feel compelled to speak for the young person. They appeared to communicate a confidence that the young person could and would speak for themselves and that they would be willing to contribute if needed.

Collaboration

Extending of the idea presented by the other, questioning for information, answering questions that further the story or continuing the storyline that had been previously begun.

All six interviews indicated that this was the most typical conversational process. It relates to invitation in that the mentor in particular would invite the young person to add to and elaborate the story.

Conflict

Disagreeing or interrupting the other with a negative response. In this study, this also included offering fuller responses that contradicted the information presented by the other.

There were very few instances of conflict in the interviews. Where these occurred they were quasi conflicts, for example the YP contradicting the mentor by saying something even more positive about them or occasional minor points of detail, such as dates that things had occurred

Confirmation

A statement of agreement; saying yes or um-hum.

These responses were frequent, but this also relates to imputation in that the mentor did not take over the conversation so that the young person only had a choice of saying yes.

Laughter

Positive shared laughter as opposed to mocking or attacking.

There was extensive laughter in the interviews and some gentle teasing both ways, for example an our dress sense, tastes in music and so on

Continuation

Continuing the narrative without reflecting on the previous comment of the other.

There were occasional instances of this but usually this was in the context of the young person becoming excited about telling a story, but this was rare and generally there was clear indication of listening to each other and continuing each other's narratives

Non Response

Explicitly avoiding responding to the other's previous comment. There was no clear indications of the use of this type of response. There were instances where the other was invited to continue through the use of nods and uhmms but no instances of a clearly deliberate negative non-response

Imputation

A question which effectively implied the answer, typically by assuming what the other person thought or felt. These also had the quality of closed or rhetorical questions.

There were instances of interpretations about the other's thoughts and feelings was offered but this was invariably followed by an invitation... asking whether the young person agreed.

Invitation

A question which was open ended and expressed a wish to know how the other person thought or felt and invited a contribution to the conversation. These were very frequent. The mentors engaged in more of these but not exclusively. There appeared to patience by both to inquire and listen to the other.

COMMUNICATIONAL EXAMPLES

The extracts from one of the mentor and mentee pairs below are representative of the characteristic pattern of the six joint interviews. Here the young person started a conversation in a section about asking for clarification of the co-construction of their story:

'YP: I don't know. Um, er, I think at that time, was I having my tuition?

M: The first year you were at home, you were home tutored weren't you?'

In all of the joint interviews we found that the Mentor did not take over the conversation or talk over the YP, and instead, as illustrated below, offers a collaborative, continuing and invitational question, checking the response with the mentee:

M: 'We found working together like that actually was a lot more relaxing, wasn't it really? It's easier to open up the conversation channels, isn't it? When you're doing something. So we had quite a lot of laughs over that really, didn't we? [Pause].

The mentors consistently showed a concern to check the narrative with the mentee and invited them to participate. What was very apparent was that the mentors paused after questions, which could have been simply imputation by waiting for the mentee to respond. Here they paused to invite a response from the young person, rather than allow this part of the conversation to be closed off. This process of pausing after questions and suggestions appeared to be extremely important not least in that it communicated a sense of patience and calmness to their conversation.

Instead of talking over the young person and assuming how they felt and thought as seen in Clarkson and Dallos (2017) here, the mentors were showing a sensitivity to the mentee and did not talk on their behalf or impute their thoughts and feelings. This generally led to a balanced and equal conversation between them.

Another example related to helping the mentee with a crisis is shown below:

M: Well I think the biggest thing with [YP] is knowing that she can rely on you so if I say something, I don't think I've let you down at all, I mean tell me if you think I have, but I try if I say I'll do something to do it and then if I'll be there, I will be there, but obviously like the time she wanted to leave [name of Home] I couldn't, do that, so we talked it through, didn't we in the end? You didn't unpack, you left all your stuff there, but you did stay, didn't you?

Interestingly in this passage the mentee revealed that instead of starting to talk for them, the mentee attempts to offer support by helping to lift their emotional state and prompting a smile.

Interviewer: What about you? What do you think your mentor feels is the best way to help you in that situation?

YP: I love chatting… but when I'm in a mood sometimes I don't, she asks me questions and she tries to get a smile out of me.

DISCUSSION

The result of this study have shown that the narrative of mentor and mentee have themes of being easy and open with each other, having fun and sharing activities together, and offering advocacy and practical help. There was a sense of the mentor being a reliable and stable presence, which was supported by the data of the self-perceived attachment orientation, and of attempts to cultivate a sense of self confidence and independence in the mentee. The dyad responded empathically to the other's emotional needs. Both visualised a future continuation of the bond. This narrative thrived within a wider supportive cultural context of support for both parties, provided by the Promise organisation. In observable behaviours it was clear that dyads collaborated, tended to agree or show support for what the other said, and did not disagree or interrupt one another. Mentors checked if their interpretations were correct, and how the other felt. They both showed positive laughter together, and actively listened to one another. These kinds of narratives and social interactions define a successful Mentor-Mentee relationship that was observed.

The findings suggest evidence that the bond of the relationship between them was internalised by the mentee. This is consistent with the work of relational attachment theorists, who have argued that interactions and positive emotional experiences become internalised, altering internal attachment models. Having emotionally satisfying shared memories that the dyad could chat about, a comfortable routine of familiar activities and roles, empathic emotional experiences, and a shared goal of the continuation of the relationship, appears to all have helped the bond become internalised. There was a good deal of evidence that a sense of warmth, humour, openness and mutual respect and caring had been cultivated in their relationships. It may be that the mentor provides a good role model for the emotionally vulnerable mentee, and provides ways of responding constructively to the challenges of life. As evidence for this there was mention of times when things had been very difficult for the mentees, which they had overcome with the mentor supporting the mentee through it. There was also evidence of practical help and support to help the young person progress in life. However, this emotional dimension contrasted with other professional relationships, and here there was attempts to help regulate low mood and empower the mentees wishes and feelings, and this was experienced as an inner warmth and kindness which mentees valued enormously.

The findings of the current study are consistent with those of Dallos, Carder-Gilbert et al. (2018) because this collaboration was also represented in individual interviews with mentees. The mentee had formed internal representations about the nature of the bond with their mentor. This resulted in a sense of being valued and security in the validity of their trust in the relationship. The current paper provides additional themes which indicated that the mentors responded empathetically to the young person's moods, such as feeling low when they did. It was also interesting that the mentor acknowledged that, like the young person, they valued the shared elements, such as the humour, help, and empathic support. The support from Promise organisation was also very important, and the mentees appreciated that this was available for their mentor. It seemed that the mentees felt reassured that their mentors were well-supported which in turn helped them to feel able to use their mentor and not that they were over-burdening them.

Some limitations of the study are that this is a very small study, of just six dyad pairs. Furthermore it is important to note that this sample is quite mature, having left childhood and are transitioning towards adulthood. This is important because the language and cognitive abilities are well developed compared to a child, but it is important to note that children who have had traumatic upbringings tend to be less emotionally mature than their same-age peers.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the bond between mentors and mentees is an extremely important aspect of the positive benefits that result from mentoring. The children described that the initial contact was very important in setting the tone for the nature of the relationship and that they typically felt that the mentors were emotionally available, positive, fun and on their side. They also described that as the relationship progresses they felt that the mentor had become a part of external and also of their inner world. Likewise the mentors described that they thought, and sometimes worried about the children while away from them. We found the analysis of the conversations between them I the conjoint interviews to be revealing and offered a start contrast to a previous study of conversation between foster carers and children in their charge. The mentors were more sensitive and invitational towards the children and enabled them to speak rather than taking over and speaking for them. This may have been because the mentors did not see themselves in a 'professional' role and as trying to change the children. Perhaps paradoxically this less intrusive approach fostered more change, certainly in the abilities of the children to express themselves. We think that exploration of conversational processes in such supportive relationships is an important direction for future research.

A specific application is that training for mentors and other supportive staff could include discussions of the sort of dyadic conversations that we recorded alongside conversational role-play activities to encourage rather than supress their abilities of young people to articulate their experiences and feelings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are significant age and gender differences in (real and hypothetical)

areas of worry that children exhibited in 8-12 years and 12-16 years of age through the start of the pandemic COVID-19. Children show both real and hypothetical worries related to the pandemic that vary with age and gender. As the areas of worry are different the approaches to resolve worries have to be different. All approaches at home, school and otherwise should embed creative arts in recognising and addressing worries in children through the entire duration of this pandemic. As COVID-19 unfolds with greater challenge, multiple unknown factors play a predominant role in changing the types of real and hypothetical worries in children linked to uncertainty, lack of control and changing environment. It is important to assess the changing nature of the areas of worry in 8-11 year and 12-16 years of children with giving them sufficient opportunities to embed Solution (SO), Detail (DE)for real problems (SODE) and support (SU) and discussion (DI)for hypothetical worries (SUDI).

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

This research was funded by PROMISE to evaluate their mentoring project. PROMISE staffs assisted with the recruitment of participants and provided a venue for data collection, but were not involved in the data collection, analysis, interpretation, or writing of the report. They had no access to the study data, but were involved in the decision to submit the report for publication. They did read drafts but made no substantive changes were made.

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