Mentoring Children and Youth: Principles, Issues, and Policy Implications for Community Programmes in New Zealand

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Mentoring is becoming an increasingly popular strategy for addressing the needs of young people who are considered at risk for failure in mainstream contexts, and many schools and social service agencies in New Zealand now conduct mentoring programmes. We suggest various psychological mechanisms for understanding the possible processes involved in effective mentoring. The literature evaluating mentoring programmes is selectively reviewed, and while the evidence is less convincing than might be expected from the confidence that some policy agencies place in mentoring, there is nevertheless indication that mentoring can have valuable outcomes, depending on how it is done. In general, the benefits for children and youth will be seen in education and the acquisition of specific life skills, rather than being a preventative panacea for all social problems. We argue that natural environments which are mentor rich are preferable to artificially designed programmes with short-term or haphazard matches between mentor and young person. Thinking carefully about the psychological processes and principles involved in mentoring should allow the development of innovative programmes that are suited to the unique cultures of Aotearoa/New Zealand, rather than simply imitating overseas models.

With nation-wide concern for the many social and familial disadvantages that place children and youth at risk for serious emotional and behavioural problems (Fergusson, Horwood, & Lynskey, 1994; Ritchie & Ritchie, 1993), policy makers have become increasingly interested in programmes that can be broadly implemented in communities at relatively little cost. Mentoring has received considerable attention–especially in the United States—as one such approach for intervening in the lives of vulnerable young people. In New Zealand, belief in mentoring as a strategy for social change is growing, and there has been an explosion of interest in schools serving low-income communities with rapidly altering demographics of traditional family structures (Adair & Dixon, 1998). The concept has popular appeal in educational, welfare, and business contexts, and various social agencies, particularly in the voluntary sector, are establishing mentoring programmes (e.g., Ave et al., 1999; Courtney, 1998). There are, however, conceptual as well as practical aspects of mentoring that need to be considered within bi-cultural Aotearoa/New Zealand. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of these psychological and social concerns, and their implications for programme development and community-based interventions for "at-risk" children and youth.

Definition and a Brief History

In Homer's *Iliad*, Mentor was Odysseus' trusted friend who became the advisor to his son Telemachus. Today, mentoring refers to an enduring relationship between a novice and an older, more experienced individual who provides guidance in a particular domain. The role is different from that of a friend (whose relationship is more reciprocal), a teacher (who imparts specific skills), or a counsellor (who offers personal guidance), although it may contain some elements of all these. Natural mentoring relationships are common in successful business (Collins & Scott, 1978), work (Kram, 1985), artistic and scientific (Zuckerman, 1977) endeavours. In human services, however, the concept has come to have a more structured, planful meaning.

Mentoring as the explicit pairing of volunteers with disadvantaged youth began in 1902, when Coulter (1913), a clerk of the juvenile court in New York city, founded the Big Brother (and later Big Sister) movement. In the USA, groups like the YMCA organised activities focussed on career encouragement, such as The Black Achievers Program of Harlem. In 1906, the alumni of an African-

American student fraternity became active in providing mentoring, tutoring, youth clubs, and bursaries. From these early origins, service organisations are now major initiators of mentoring programmes; in New Zealand, for example, there has been a long-standing collaboration between Penrose High School and the local Rotary, and Presbyterian Support Service in Otago has a well-established programme using mainly tertiary students as mentors.

Boston (1976) reported that mentoring allows school children to focus on experimentation and self-appraisal which promotes new competencies. By the early 1980s, partnerships between American corporations and school districts had emerged, driven by concern with the need for a better educated workforce (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). In addition to businesses providing schools with material support, many of these partnerships also encouraged employees to mentor the pupils, often in company time. A New Zealand example of such a partnership is that between Tangaroa College and the Fletcher corporation. Mentoring thus became seen as one of five major strategies for reversing school failure (Dondero, 1997). Incidental data further emphasised the value of the social support provided by ad hoc mentoring relationships, especially for vulnerable groups, such as the children of alcoholics (O'Sullivan, 1991) and low-income youth (Freedman, 1988).

Contemporary Implications

In contemporary Britain and the USA, schools are faced with challenging statistics on their failure to provide effective learning environments for all children. Escalating rates of school violence, academic failure, and serious psychological problems among students, have tended to create a sense of crisis. Thus, mentoring has typically been welcomed in school settings overseas, with peer mentoring, in which older or more skilled students mentor younger pupils, now widespread (e.g., Dearden, 1998). Manuals exist with detailed guidelines and materials to help teachers get mentors into classrooms and schools (e.g., Reglin, 1998), with New Zealand protocols usually introducing a bi-cultural perspective (e.g., Tararua Tuakana/Taina, 1999). The NZ Ministry of Education has funded various mentoring projects in low-decile high schools, and mentor training for community volunteers is available at Unitec and Manukau Institute of Technology.

As a preventative approach, mentoring seems to reflect the grass-roots, naturalistic values of community psychology (Rappaport, 1977). At the same time, the formal use of volunteer mentors—as opposed to developing youth-oriented schools, supports, and policies—is not fully in keeping with ecologically valid approaches to social change. Within the field of behaviour therapy there has also been considerable precedence for using non-professionals as intervention agents, and in training parents, teachers, and other members of the community to be more effective in supporting positive behaviour in children (Evans, 1999; Tharp & Wetzel, 1969). However at least one behaviourally-designed programme using mentors, the "Buddy System" in Hawaii, showed an iatrogenic effect: youth who were at risk for delinquency actually *increased* their likelihood of offending (Fo & O'Donnell, 1974). As a result of these considerations, the activity of mentoring has not been received within professional psychology with complete enthusiasm.

Psychological Mechanisms

Mentoring has typically been advocated with little consideration of the psychological mechanisms underlying it as a means of social influence. There is a tendency for the positive effects of mentoring to be attributed to other outcomes, such as enhanced self-esteem, in a circular fashion. However, there are a number of possibly relevant causal principles, none of which are mutually exclusive. We have divided them into simple categories, hoping these very general propositions provide some clarification of the conditions that might enhance mentoring's effects. It is also imperative to have a theory of the supposed mechanisms in order to conduct meaningful process and outcome evaluations, to be discussed in the next section.

Role Model

The most frequently used conceptualisation of a relationship with an older, more experienced person, is that of the role model. If one has a model of the kind of individual one aspires to be, then the person representing that ideal provides a variety of definable characteristics which the younger person imitates and thus gradually becomes more similar to in terms of values, attitudes, and social behaviours (Coleman, 1992). In psychoanalytically-based theories, the impact of a role model is through a process of identification, in which there is an emotional attachment causing the young person to aspire to be like the model, and assimilate his/her characteristics. In social learning theory, however, the process is usually defined as one of imitational learning (Bandura, 1971). The advantage of this latter theory is that it specifies some of the conditions under which modelling will take place, for example if the individual sees the model being rewarded. Both the concept of modelling and of identification presume that the younger individual will be more influenced by the model if there is an emotional bond.

This level of theoretical influence designates processes having their primary effects via *motivational* forces—creating a desire to emulate the achievements of the model, particularly ethnically-relevant ones (Yancey, 1998). But individuals also have to believe that certain outcomes are possible (outcome expectancies) in order to engage in the necessary practice and effort that will increase their chances of attainment. On the negative side, it is possible that the role modelled is so distant from the possible range of accomplishment for the young person that far from providing a positive incentive it merely reduces the mentee's self efficacy beliefs.

In the case of role models representing particular cultural or ethnic groups, the influence may be especially important if it shows how people of a certain group can succeed, thus counteracting the pervasive negative stereotypes of some minority groups created by the media (Phinney, 1990; Taylor, 1989). This form of cultural

empowerment is of considerable relevance in the New Zealand context. By matching young people with successful adult members of the same group, the role model will have a specific impact on the mentee's cultural identity and aspiration levels (Leibrich, 1993).

Parental Substitute

Research evidence consistently demonstrates that for healthy social development it is necessary to have functional parental figures to allow children to learn both social values and everyday skills (Haensly & Parsons, 1993; Shonhoff & Meisels, 2000). In formal mentoring programmes there is an implicit assumption that some young people are either deprived of parental influences or the sources they have are judged dysfunctional. A common scenario of modern society is for young people to be brought up in solo parent families in which the father is an absent figure. Since socialisation experiences for personal identity and inter-gender relationship may benefit from experiencing both male and female influences, the presumption is that a mentor substitutes for the kinds of learning that would otherwise come from the other parent. It has also been noted that boys from predominantly female-headed households have few if any male role models who value academic achievement (Holland, 1991).

In addition to the provision of learning experiences, parents influence children's development through the presence of routines and structure, emotional warmth and responsivity, and effective monitoring rather than harsh discipline and exposure to violence (Rutter, 1989). The broad impact of such influences can be thought of in terms of the child's development of a "secure" ego (Ainsworth, 1989): the sense of what kind of person one is and what sorts of values one holds. In a study of the actual roles adopted by mentors of pregnant adolescents, Blinn-Pike and her colleagues (1998) described the context as that of "quasi-parenting." The mentors had no legal responsibility, but the mix of both mundane (helping with day-to-day tasks) and significant (being present at labour and delivery) activities resulted in high levels of intimacy.

The possibility of harmful effects from de facto parental relationship are considerable. For example, there may be alienation of affection from the actual parent, who has fewer resources, is under greater stress, or has more responsibilities than the mentor. Similarly, the attachment to the mentor as a parent figure may become very intense and important to the child. Mentors, however, will inevitably come and go. Thus if the young person is seeking a more permanent attachment, the loss of a mentor who moves on to other activities may be further demonstration that older people cannot be relied upon, or that intimate relationships always result in disappointing outcomes.

Social Support

It has been widely recognised in psychology that for emotional well-being we all require social support, from material benefits to the simple sharing of feelings (e.g., Durie, 1994; Rutter, 1987). Werner and Smith (1982) conducted a 30-year study of 700 high-risk children and showed that those who thrived had all found at least one other person—in addition to their parents—who had provided consistent emotional support. In a study of the grown-up children of alcoholics, those who were most resilient (high self-regard and capacity for intimate relationships) had experienced a mentor outside the family who had taken an interest in them as children (O'Sullivan, 1991). Nevertheless, the demonstrated relationship between social support and resilience does not discount the possibility that there is some other attribute among resilient children that allows them to seek out, make, and profit from relationships with supportive adults (Rhodes, 1994).

Many challenging behaviours exhibited at home or at school may be related to feelings of anger, anxiety, jealousy and other emotions that some children have little opportunity to explore in a safe and caring relationship. Mentoring facilitates such communication and self-disclosure (Haensly & Parsons, 1993), although this could result in the blurring of roles so that the mentor becomes increasingly like a counsellor.

Specific Positive Skill Development

A more structured set of influences is that the mentor will actually teach specific competencies and new skills. This hypothesises that the mentor *does* need to function like a teacher and actually show the young person how to perform, whether they are domestic activities, sports, or hobbies and leisure pursuits. To a lesser extent the mentor may also demonstrate and teach certain kinds of social, coping, and problem-solving skills. For adolescents, programmes usually focus on career and work opportunities, so that behaviours fostered are related to the actual expertise needed in a particular job. As young people move to new settings, particularly the change from being a teenager to becoming an independent adult, there are important transitional skills including parenting and child care that need to be acquired (Mech, Pryde, & Rycraft, 1995).

On the negative side, however, it is possible that the mentor might come from such a different cultural background and teach such discrepant standards of conduct that the mentee is no longer happy, satisfied, or accepted in his or her more typical setting. Thus the skills learned from a mentor may not be the most functional for the young person's home environment—lack of generalisation in behavioural terms. And to acquire skills that need on-going expense or special opportunity for them to be continued would not be in the best interests of the child.

Modifying Undesirable Behaviours

The role of the mentor as behaviour change agent is less often mentioned in the literature. This could be due to the fact that while participants may be at risk for dysfunctional behaviour, at the time they are selected most do not exhibit a significant repertoire of problematic behaviours. Some children will, however, have such behaviours, and inevitably negative behaviours occur during the time they and the mentor are together, including serious behaviours like physical assault (Ringwalt, Graham, Paschall, Flewelling, & Browne, 1996). In this case there will be a requirement

on the mentor to manage discipline, just like any parent or teacher may have to deal with oppositional or disruptive behaviour (Morris & Hawkins, 1999).

The mentor's competencies for dealing with negative behaviours are typically not well defined and may be very variable, such as projects that use former gang members as mentors (e.g., Hritz & Gabow, 1997). But the successful management of behavioural difficulties is one of the obvious ways in which the mentor influences the mentee, and this type of intervention needs to be recognised, and tutoring in positive behaviour management strategies provided (Evans, 1999). Presumably the importance of such influence increases with the degree of challenging behaviour revealed by the child, and this in turn relates to the programme's selection criteria.

Ecological Influences

Although keeping young people occupied and busy is rarely mentioned in mentoring programme descriptions, the reality is that time spent with the mentor is likely to be more constructive than time spent alone or in the company of other youngsters exhibiting anti-social behaviours (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Children with limited family supports, financial opportunities, or geographical locations handy to resources, have few opportunities to engage in the kinds of everyday activities, entertainments, and leisure pursuits many families take for granted (Evans, Wilson, Hansson, & Hungerford, 1997). Mentors often take their mentees to specific events and recreational activities, thus allowing them to spend leisure time in a positive and enjoyable way. There may also be related indirect effects by virtue of the parent or family having respite if there is conflict in the household, or significant conduct problems.

The only negative elements associated with this source of influence on young people might be the extent that one becomes dependent and does not develop personal resources to entertain oneself constructively, perhaps through reading, participating in sports, or joining social clubs or cultural and church groups. Again, the implication is that effective mentors may have to ensure that time spent is not so unique that it could not be continued by the young person once the formal relationship has ended. This type of influence can be considered ecological - it has its positive benefits in terms of its impact on the environment of the young person rather than any direct attempt to alter the behavioural repertoire. Such effects are very important and often underestimated in lay theories of behaviour change, which assume that it is individual personality characteristics and traits (such as "self-esteem") which determine how people function.

Examples of Mentoring Programmes and their Evaluation

To show how these various mechanisms of influence might be elaborated, it is helpful to consider examples of well-developed mentoring programmes, looking first at documented outcomes and then considering some of the characteristics and process variables that seem to relate to greater effectiveness. Unfortunately there are as yet no published, methodologically-adequate, outcome studies of mentoring projects in New Zealand, although evaluation studies do exist (e.g., Ave et al., 1999).

Outcomes

Experimental studies (in which mentored participants are compared to a matched, no-treatment control group), are rare and have typically *not* revealed large group differences, which needs to be remembered when programmes are uncritically transported to New Zealand. Parents of youth who are being mentored usually report their children as "greatly improved" (Grossman & Grant, 1997), but objective data are less positive. Royse (1998), for example, experimentally evaluated a project developed for African-American adolescents. The mentors were ethnically-matched, employed, university graduates. Compared to adolescents randomly assigned to a no-treatment control group, the participants showed no increase in self-esteem and school marks, or decreases in absences from school and disciplinary actions. Slicker and Palmer (1993) found that relative to a control group, mentored high school students showed no improvement in drop out rates or grades. However, these authors then divided the teens into those who had been *effectively* mentored and those who had not, and found a significant improvement in achievement and return-to-school rates for those in the effective mentoring group.

Project RAISE was established in 1988 in Baltimore, with seven community organisations sponsoring commitments to provide support to pupils in middle schools. The evaluation examined dependent variable effect sizes for RAISE students compared with matched students from the same district (McPartland & Nettles, 1991). Although improvements were recorded in attendance, gains tended to be insufficient to alter the academic characteristics that had placed these pupils at risk in the first place. As late as 1995, Tierney, Grossman, and Resch (1995) were able to bemoan that despite so much enthusiasm for mentoring, there was no solid evidence that it produced beneficial results.

A controlled study of mentoring by Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBS), however, has provided positive outcome data. Youth referred to BBBS affiliates were randomly assigned to either a match with a mentor or a waiting list control condition. After 18 months, the young people in the mentoring programme: (a) were less likely to start using drugs or engage in physical aggression; (b) had improved school attendance, attitudes to school work, and academic performance; and (c) had better relationships with peers and family (Grossman & Tierney, 1998). Positive outcome data have also been reported for PROJECT 2000, which started in Washington DC in 1988. The basic model involved placing in primary schools employed young African American men to serve half a day a week as teacher assistants and tutors. Apart from occasional field trips there was no out-of-school contact. A comparison with a matched group of children from similar schools not having this programme, showed that the children in PROJECT 2000 had better scores on standardised tests of reading, spelling,

and mathematics, but that the effect was seen only in boys (Holland, 1998).

In an outcome evaluation of *Across Ages*, a mentored group that received all the programme components (mentoring, life skills, community service, and parental involvement), was compared with a group that received all components *except* mentoring. While both groups did better than a no-treatment group on various self-report measures, the mentored group obtained significantly more favourable scores on attitudes towards school and their future, feelings of well-being, and the management of stress (Rogers & Taylor, 1997). The mentors were retired people, ranging in age from 51 to 93. Training was implemented to ensure that the elderly people understood youth culture and did not lecture the youth or try to impose their ideas. The mentored youth reported that the best mentors were those who were good listeners, allowed them to do fun things, and taught them something new (LoSciuto, Rajala, Townsend, & Taylor, 1996).

Flaxman (1992), in reviewing mentoring programmes, found that: (a) there was often a difference between the youth the programme was designed for and the actual participants; (b) there was a lack of specificity of what transpired between mentor and mentee; (c) there was frequently an overlap between the mentoring function and other roles, such as that of teacher; (d) the mentor characteristics were varied and loosely defined, with the fit between mentor and mentee both difficult to arrange and describe; and finally (e), the gains made were often small and short-term and that evaluation efforts expected dramatic outcomes to be reported immediately. All these factors, Flaxman pointed out, make the evaluation of generic "mentoring" extremely difficult, and outcome studies of specific programmes to be of limited use without concern for process issues such as type of mentor and mentor/mentee relationships.

Types of Mentor

In one survey of typical mentors, more than 75% had tertiary qualifications and 80% perceived themselves as middle class, who felt they could "make a difference" and wanted to "give back to the community" (Jones, Bibbins, & Henderson, 1993).Researchers at Cornell University investigated business-based mentoring projects and concluded that because there are considerable resources involved in recruiting and training mentors, priority should be given to children in the greatest need. The mentors themselves required support and encouragement. They also claimed that programmes focussed on specific competencies were better than those which emphasised simply the relationship between mentor and child (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1992). Projects that include entrepreneurial (Wright, Owen, McGuire, & Backman, 1994) or environmental education activities (Hurley & Lustbader, 1997) can attract diverse volunteers.

Although mentoring is often associated with adults who would not otherwise come into contact with young people, there has also been interest in those who are already involved with youth to better serve in a mentoring role. Thus some schools have encouraged their teachers to take a special interest in a pupil and be available as a support for personal issues going beyond the formal academic situation. Devine (1995), for example, encouraged graduate students in education and psychology to serve as tutors and mentors in the overcrowded, troubled, inner-city high schools of New York, creating what he called a "community of learners".

In a programme one of us developed in up-state New York called the Binghamton School Partnership, teachers with a special interest in children were identified in schools having a high failure and drop-out rate (Evans & Okifuji, 1992). These teachers were given special incentives and training to devise activities they might do with the most disadvantaged young people, such as organising a visit to a museum, a weekend outdoor adventure experience, and a community art project. Rather than relying on the recruitment of new volunteer mentors, such initiatives attempt to add a mentoring dimension to the role of professionals already working with children. As Freedman (1998) has written: "there's been too much focus on volunteer mentoring as the exclusive way to reach kids. We need to recreate social work roles and other kinds of staff roles so that people have more time to spend with kids, and are freed up from all the paperwork...Ultimately, the solution is to create mentor-rich environments for kids."

Where other–usually older–children are used as mentors, it is described as "peer mentoring." Such approaches have the advantages of the potentially greater social influence of peers as opposed to adults. As long as the peers are able to model socially desirable behaviours, these relationships might be thought of as the pro-social opposite of the influence of youth gangs. In a project specifically targeting aggressive behaviour and violence in a high-crime public housing project, it was found that the mentored children did better than the comparison group, essentially because the latter's attitudes worsened, whereas the mentored youngsters' did not (Sheehan, DiCara, LeBailly, & Christoffel, 1999).

Process Issues and the Mentoring Relationship

While programmes themselves tend to emphasise the relationship as being the heart of mentoring, there has been minimal research on the actual connections formed. Many abstruse suggestions are made regarding the relationship as increasing the young person's emotional "resilience", enhancing their "sense of self", and creating "safe havens." While such goals sound admirable, the vagueness of these concepts makes it difficult to evaluate the processes involved. The evidence indicates that the importance of the relationship is contingent on the kinds of outcomes being reported. For example, Project RAISE was designed to enhance school performance and reduce substance abuse and pregnancy. The outcomes over a 2-year period were modest: participants had improved attendance and marks, but continued to have poor overall academic performance. There was, however, evidence that any positive benefits achieved were strongly related to the actual implementation of a successful one-to-one relationship between mentor and mentee (McPartland & Nettles, 1991).

Some young people are better able to form a relationship with a mentor than others. Rhodes and her colleagues examined supports for teenage mothers. Some of the girls already had natural mentoring relationships, such as an older sibling or grandparent. When these teens were assigned a Big Sister, they were quickly able to form a strong relationship with her. Girls with no prior natural mentors, however, had a more difficult time forming a relationship. The girls who did, however, were in all cases those whose assigned mentor was very *persistent*, who kept on showing up despite an early apparent lack of interest on the part of the teenage mentees (Rhodes, Ebert, & Meyers, 1994).

Some mentors can become critical of those being mentored, and attribute, as barriers to success, *negative* traits in the young people themselves (Jones, Bibbins, & Henderson, 1993). Such counterproductive attitudes may develop out of frustration when positive expectancies are negated by children from very challenging backgrounds. All experienced commentators affirm that it is important for mentors to have realistic notions as to the nature and possibilities of their role.

Community and Systemic Issues

Changing Systems

Despite general enthusiasm for mentoring programmes in many quarters, it is important to understand the assumed purpose of mentoring and the context in which it functions. If a mentoring programme is expected to provide a simple solution to a complex problem, there is likely to be disappointment to all concerned. Mentoring is not effective or ineffective in the abstract, but has specific outcomes in specific circumstances. For young people who already exhibit more extreme needs there is evidence that strengthening alternatives, systemic school reform, and broad based community partnerships are all necessary to provide effective services (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989). However, Evans (Evans, Okifuji, Engler, Bromley, & Tishelman, 1993; Evans, Okifuji, & Thomas, 1995) found that while teachers were often willing to adopt a more mentor-like role, their tendency to blame families for children's difficulties at school needed to be modified first, before constructive changes in school "atmosphere" could occur.

Another misgiving we have is that "volunteerism" as a general concept is overly regarded by conservative political forces. Social analysts express concern over mentoring being a strategy that creates the impression of a grass-roots effort but which covers up deficiencies in more general social and educational policies. If the group of young people targeted are very economically disadvantaged, mentoring projects that do not change their living circumstances cannot be expected to produce results (Royse, 1998). It may be questioned as to whether any artificial arrangements are even desirable, given that ideal social supports are the natural ones available from one's social community.

The Target Populations

Various commentators have also criticised the concept of young people as "at risk", being concerned that this is somehow a new diagnostic category focussing on the supposed deficits of individuals (Tidwell & Corona Garrett, 1994), rather than thinking of a continuum of risky behaviours that lead on to more serious activities (McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 1995). In New Zealand, the same kinds of behavioural problems for considering young people at risk have been identified as in other comparable countries, with the addition that the youth suicide rate is sufficiently high to warrant special consideration (e.g., Langford, Ritchie, & Ritchie, 1998). In this country, however, there is a particular danger in labelling Maori and Pacific Island youth "at risk" when educational initiatives targeted at early drop-out (or "push out" in many cases) have not changed the "cultural composition of teachers and counsellors, nor the curriculum and assessment procedures of state secondary schools" (Hindmarsh, Hohepa, & Murphy, 1995, p. 131).

One way around the identification/stigmatising issue is to embed mentoring in general community projects available to all. A typical project of the Binghamton School Partnership (Evans & Okifuji, 1992) involved the construction of a barn in the agricultural fairground of a small, impoverished, rural town. The project took place during the summer holidays and the "mentors" were local farmers, firemen, police officers, and so on from that community. Almost all the high school students from that district were economically disadvantaged, and anyone who wished to participate were invited to do so.

Implicit Mentoring: The Cultural and Family Context

One of the most obvious questions in the design of mentoring projects is the extent to which formal programmes can replicate the phenomena of natural mentoring relationships. Mentoring can occur without deliberate planning. For example, in our Department of Psychology, Kaupapa Maori tutors ostensibly function in much the same way as any of the course tutors (Nikora, Moeke-Pickering, & Paewai, 1996). However it is more of a mentoring relationship that develops, incorporating many aspects of personal and academic life. Similarly, experienced science students, serving as kaitiaki (mentors) at the University of Waikato, have fostered Maori networks that generate "an atmosphere of togetherness, of being a whanau" (Rua & Nikora, 1999, p. 32). Not surprisingly, formal programmes in contexts where there have been historic injustice and disadvantage, have reported strong, positive benefits of tutoring being subsumed by the emotional support of mentoring (e.g., Kagee, Naidoo, & Mahatey, 1997).

Mentoring is not a discrete intervention, but occurs in a context which in turn will influence or moderate its impact. Rhodes, Haight, and Briggs (1999) reported that its effects depended on whether the adolescent mentees were in foster care or with their own families (foster parents reported greater benefits in social skills), as well as whether the foster care was with relatives or with nonrelatives (teenage mentees fostered with relatives reported the greater gains in social

support). The patterns of these interactions confirm that the relationship with the mentor is likely to be intertwined with the mentees' relationships with parental figures and extended family members.

Conclusions

Rhodes (1994) concluded that "both natural and assigned mentors have the potential to modify, or even reverse, the developmental trajectories of at-risk youth" (p. 194). It is for this reason that there is a great deal of interest in the concept as a strategy for supporting vulnerable young people, and so educators and psychologists in this country are likely to become increasingly involved in planned mentoring. Yet there remain many uncertainties regarding the ideal mentor or mentoring relationship. All commentators on formal mentoring programmes emphasise that the screening, selection, and training of the mentors is a critical issue, for safety, if nothing else. Interestingly, although there is clear need for support and supervision of mentors to prevent burn-out, most mentors have reported their participation as a highly positive experience that has increased their understanding of individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

It is probably also true that *all* young people can benefit from a positive mentoring relationship, and so to designate a discrete programme for a few special cases has potential problems. Similarly, the evidence documents the value of caring adult-adolescent relationships, but does not support the assumption that these need to be limited to 1–on–1 mentoring (Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998). On the other hand it can be argued that children with social advantages already have well-established opportunities from parents, relatives/whanau, and family friends, so that for those young people who are socially isolated from older, wiser role models it is reasonable to facilitate mentoring relationships wherever possible. Nevertheless, it is important that these not be too artificial, too short-term, or overly concentrated on remedying deficits. Those mentoring programmes that have clearly specified goals, generally around the acquisition of new competencies, seem to have the most beneficial outcomes.

Mentoring relationships centred on having fun, respecting the young person's viewpoint, and involving the mentee in the decisions regarding how to spend time ("developmental" relationships), are more successful than those that are prescriptive: that focus on transforming or changing the behaviour of the mentee and that adopt an authoritarian or parental type of role (Freedman, 1998). One study of the actual mentoring process (DuBois & Neville, 1997) showed that long-term mentoring relationships characterised by emotional closeness needed fewer contact hours between the youth and the mentors. This supports other findings that the closeness, consistency, and durability of the relationship is more important than the actual amount of time spent together.

In and of itself, mentoring is not likely to be an effective strategy for preventing crime (Sherman, 1997), or for directly solving serious social problems which are multiply determined. What evidence there is regarding general outcomes of formal projects indicates that mentoring is a viable strategy for helping children stay more engaged with school, that it seems to reduce or prevent substance abuse, and that when successful relationships form they are able to support young people's motivation to succeed at some facet of life (Lee & Cramond, 1999). Mentoring is not well suited to remedying social and emotional deficits of child development, nor a good substitute for permanent, caring family relationships and constructive peer friendships.

Although there are well-developed mentoring projects in New Zealand, such as the sophisticated Buddy Programme conducted by Presbyterian Support in Dunedin, mentoring as a formal activity seems to have a strong American cultural ethos, with a presumption of the value of the individualistic, single relationship, rather than group or collective activities. While there is now some recognition in the US literature that different cultural and ethnic groups need to be involved in the planning and design of programmes (e.g., Smythe & Saulnier, 1996), there is virtually no discussion of the cultural "fit"of mentoring. There is no questioning of the presumption that solo-parent family structures are high-risk, or thought given to how older relatives, extended family groupings, cultural communities such as religious groups, and so on, might already provide many of the functions of the European-style nuclear family. In Aotearoa/New Zealand there are institutions such as whanau, the marae, the role of grandparents, and many other social contexts available to promote healthy child development. Thus, it seems possible to emphasise for this country a more natural, indigenous, and culturally appropriate set of structures to support the psychological benefits of mentoring, without automatically, and uncritically, imposing an imported, specific *style* of mentoring programme.

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