

MENTORING SHY STUDENTS: AN EFFECTIVE APPROACH TO DEVELOP SELF-ESTEEM



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INTRODUCTION

- As one of four research projects in cooperation with the Laidlaw Schools Trust and Durham University, this project is part of the greater effort to improve school performance in disadvantaged communities, and thus achieve more educational equality.
- A focal point of the research has been specifically on disadvantaged pupils and those who suffer from vulnerability and at-risk factors.
- Vulnerability factor 'shyness': Shy students suffer from anxiety and fear of being called upon by the teacher and are often perceived as disinterested or less intelligent by their teachers and their classmates.
- This can lead to shy children having a lower opinion of their academic competencies, preventing them from reaching their full potential.
- Previous research shows that shyness is connected with low levels of self-esteem¹.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- This project aims to create a problem-focused mentoring approach that promotes self-esteem in shy children after transitioning to secondary schools. The mentoring programme needs to fulfil two conditions:
 1. It must enable mentees to build self-esteem by supporting the development of a safe, supportive nurturing relationships (SSNRs) with an adult mentor.
 2. It must include 'problem-focused' or 'transitional' mentoring, showing greater effectiveness through the use of science-based curricula and activities tailored to specific developmental needs².
- From these we can derive two research questions:
 1. What exactly constitutes a close, growth-promoting mentoring relationship – as opposed to one that ends abruptly or fails to matter to either party?
 2. What curricula, practice elements and structured activities can mentors use to support the development of self-esteem in shy children?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- Literature reviews in the topic areas of mentoring, vulnerability and shyness in school education have been conducted.
- Ideas have then been presented, discussed and developed with the other scholars and the project supervisors.
- Weekly reports have been written which were then used as the foundation for the final research report.
- We have explored the opportunities and risks of Multi-Academy Trusts and met with school leaders and researchers who are part of the 'Braintrust', which has been set up by the Laidlaw Foundation to share expert knowledge in the field.
- We have prepared ethical approval documents for primary research in the following Year 2 research period.

RESULTS

- To achieve a close and growth-promoting relationship, appropriate training for mentors is required.
- This means that mentors have to be made aware of the crucial importance of relationship building in dealing with shy students, who find it difficult to converse with an unfamiliar adult.
- Mentoring may involve the use of dialogue journals, which stimulates conversation and facilitates the process of getting to know each other.
- The mentor may choose from a further range of pre-planned activities, such as 'Developing a Me Poster' or 'Constructing a Happiness is... Booklet'.
- The activities should facilitate the development of at least one of the four conditions of self-esteem – the sense of connectiveness, the sense of uniqueness, the sense of power and the sense of role models³.

Table 1: Items from the Children's Shyness Questionnaire¹

1. I find it hard to talk to someone I don't know.
2. I am easily embarrassed.
3. I am usually quiet when I am with others.
6. I feel shy when I have to read aloud in front of the class.
12. I feel shy when I am the centre of attention.
13. Do you blush a lot?
15. If the teacher asked for someone to act in a play would you put your hand up?
16. It is easy for me to make friends.
17. I would be embarrassed if the teacher put me in the front row on stage.
19. I go red when the teacher praises my work.
20. I feel shy when I have to go into a room full of people.
24. I usually talk to only one or two close friends.
26. I go red whenever I have to speak to a girl (boy) of my age.

CONCLUSION

- The problem-based mentoring approach indicates greater effectiveness due to its built-in practices and activities targeted at developing their global self-esteem.
- Practitioners should be wary of creating overly rigid or prescriptive curricula, which may hinder the relationship-building process.
- The relationship is not only an integral element of mentoring, but also facilitates problem-focused intervention and, most importantly, the realisation of the human developmental need to affiliate themselves with like-minded others.
- Affiliation is particularly important for shy pupils, as they "develop less close and more highly dependent relationships with [their teacher and] are at increased concurrent and predictive risk for a number of school adjustment difficulties"⁵.
- While this argues for mentoring after they transition to secondary school, 'transitional mentoring programmes', by definition, often provide relationships of shorter duration and therefore less closeness, which may not adequately address the development needs of shy children.

REFERENCES

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- ⁴ Rubin, K.H., Coplan, R.J. and Bowker, J.C., 2009. Social withdrawal in childhood. *Annual review of psychology*, 60, pp. 141-171.