Project Title: Research with Durham University on Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) - Mentoring Shy Children after Transition to Secondary School: A Problem-Focused Approach

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Introduction

Under the core question, 'What makes a successful Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)?', four Laidlaw Scholars have been researching different topic areas affecting the Laidlaw Schools Trust, with the help of Durham University. In doing so, the Year 1 summer research period focuses on refining the research proposals, strategies and frameworks, whereas the Year 2 research period will cover the implementation of these findings. This project aims to create a problem-focused mentoring approach that supports the development of self-esteem in shy children after their transition to secondary school. In summing up the findings for the Year 1 research period, this report finds that a balanced approach between developing a trust-based relationship with the mentee and applying built-in problem-focused interventions are the most helpful in developing self-esteem in shy students.

In terms of structure, the first part of this report states the reasons for choosing a problem-based mentoring approach as the focus of this research and explains why shy children are vulnerable and therefore need this support. After that, the two main research questions are presented. The third part sets out the methodology for the research period of the second year, which consists of a qualitative and a quantitative method. In the fourth section, preliminary answers to the research questions will be given, including best practices for a problem-focused research project for shy children. Finally, this report presents the conclusion made so far as well as further issues to be addressed.

Rationale

Approaches to Mentoring

In a one-to-one environment, a youth mentor can focus fully on the individual child or adolescent. This allows the mentee to feel seen and valued and helps create a relationship of trust in which the child can confide his/her personal, social and academic issues to the mentor. At the same time, the mentor can provide comfort and give advice, as well as encourage the mentee and act as a role model. This mutual, trust-based relationship is at the core of most mentoring programmes and is crucial to the predominant 'developmental model' of youth mentoring by Jean Rhodes (2005). According to this theory, a close relationship with a non-parental adult promotes a child's social-emotional, cognitive and identity development. Positive development outcomes include, for example, improved parental relationships and increased academic engagement.

Markham and Aveyard (2003) clearly demonstrated the fundamental significance of these relationships in a school-based context, as they ascertained the need for health promoting pedagogic practices in schools, such as mentoring. By drawing on previous research on human functioning, they identified education as the main facilitator of positive developmental outcomes such as high self-esteem and a well-defined sense of identity, as well as, ultimately, good health. This is because education enables the realisation of the two essential human capacities, *practical reasoning* and *affiliation*[1] and thus promotes good human functioning. In particular, practical reasoning, the capacity to imagine, think and reason, lies at the heart of school education.

In order to foster the development of these cognitive skills and, furthermore, help the pupils to reflect critically on themselves, additional support, such as mentoring, may be necessary. This need becomes even more apparent as we look towards the capacity to affiliate yourself with like-minded others and develop mutually satisfying relationships. As mentoring programmes are traditionally centred around creating safe, supportive nurturing relationships (SSNRs) between adults and youths, their

[1] In her theory of human functioning, Nussbaum (1990) highlights practical reasoning and affiliation as the two most important human capacities. This is because everything we do is planned and organised with the help of our capacity to reason and with the consideration of other humans (Markham and Aveyard, 2003, p. 1211).

purpose is to make mentees feel socially supported and help them develop a socially valued identity. This support is especially valuable for pupils affected by "characteristics such as low self-esteem [which is] socially constructed, rather than solely derived from the individual" (Markham and Aveyard, 2003, p. 1212).

Along with the rapid growth of school-based mentoring programmes over the past three decades, primarily in the United States (Randolph and Johnson, 2008, p. 177), interest into the effectiveness of these mentoring relationships has risen significantly. Thus, most studies on the effects of mentoring programmes have tried to evaluate them in terms of specific outcomes for youths such as social competence and academic achievement. Subsequently, several meta-analyses concluded that mentoring, as currently practiced, has small or moderate effects on these outcomes and, for example, brings limited or no improvements in pupils' academic achievements (Education Endowment Foundation, 2018). However, as various recommendations were made to improve the quality of these programmes, the focus shifted away from mentoring as an educational intervention to realise essential human capacities. This means that the core purpose of youth mentoring which is to provide SSNRs to mentees, proven to increase resilience against adverse circumstances on mental health and wellbeing, has been pushed into the background (Cavell et al., 2021, p. 288).

Furthermore, researchers have recently pointed out the contradiction between the non-specific developmental model of mentoring and the narrow focus of many studies on specific outcomes. The fact that social-emotional, cognitive and identity development outcomes through mentoring are often interrelated, long-term and non-specific (Raposa et al., 2019, p. 424) has rarely been acknowledged. For this reason, Cavell et al. (2021) presented a functional typology of current mentoring programmes, including supportive, problem-focused and transitional programmes. On the one hand, 'supportive programmes' are based on the traditional friendship-based model. On the other hand, 'problem-focused' and 'transitional programmes' target a specific group of young people facing challenges, such as depression, or a major change in their life, such as a transition to another school, and use targeted interventions and practices to address these issues. This typology allows for a better assessment of the effectiveness of problem-based and transitional mentoring

programmes in particular, as they are only tested on their ability to achieve set goals, rather than an arbitrary range of outcomes.

Although this is still a recent development in the field of research, several studies have already shown greater effectiveness of programmes that incorporate science-based curricula, practice elements and activities and target the developmental needs of a group of young people with similar challenges. Hence, a meta-analysis found the problem-focused mentoring approach overall to be twice as effective as the non-specific traditional approach in achieving respective development goals (Christensen et al., 2020). Based on these findings, this research project aims to develop a framework for a problem-based mentoring programme to help shy pupils overcome low self-esteem. The moderate to strong link between shyness and low self-esteem was clearly highlighted in a study by Crozier (1995). In particular, the study indicated that 11-year-old Year 7 students were shier after their transition to secondary school than before, and thus more likely to suffer from lower self-esteem. As a result of their low self-esteem, these pupils were disproportionately affected by sadness, unhappiness and fearfulness, as well as a lack of self-worth in several areas such as physical appearance and academic competence (Crozier, 1995, p. 94).

Vulnerability and Shyness in School Education

Several studies have suggested that problem-focused mentoring approaches are more effective than supportive programmes that purely follow the traditional developmental model. This is mainly due to the way these approaches are structured, as they target specific students with the greatest developmental needs and help them to overcome certain challenges (Cavell, 2021; Christensen, 2020). Correspondingly, Haney and Durlak (1998) found interventions to be especially effective when they specifically targeted changing self-esteem in students with existing problems. Despite all participants demonstrating some gains in self-esteem, pupils with externalising problems – which are apparent to other people – such as shyness or aggression, showed the greatest improvements in self-esteem. In fact, self-esteem interventions often yielded medium to large effects on these pupils, compared to smaller effects for students with other or no pre-existing problems, who, “by definition, are already functioning in the normal range to begin with” (Haney and Durlak, 1998, p. 429).

Hence, many mentoring programmes have focused on ‘vulnerable’ and ‘at-risk’ pupils (Raposa, 2019), facing issues which either put them at risk of not passing their study programme or may otherwise negatively impact on their study, their behaviour or their mental health. Although there is no complete list of what these factors might be, we can observe that most of them fall into three main categories – issues affecting the learner themselves, their family and their role in the society (see Table 1). These categories are often interlinked, as, for example, a learner with a history of abusive relationships or domestic violence within the family may therefore also show signs of emotional or behavioural issues in class (Stork and Walker, 2015, p. 52-53). Similarly, shyness and low self-esteem as ‘emotional and/or behavioural issues’, are likely to be interrelated with other risk factors, such as ‘English as a second or other language’ (EAL). Therefore, recognising and addressing these complex individual issues, which can be done best in a one-to-one environment, becomes a necessary task for every mentor who intends to help students overcome their emotional and behavioural challenges.

Table 1: Characteristics of at risk or vulnerable learners (Stork and Walker, 2015, p. 53)

Learner	***Family***	***Society***
The learner has: • a history of safeguarding issues, academic failure and/or suspension or exclusion; • a history of alcohol and/or substance misuse; • an identified learning difficulty; • emotional and/or behavioural issues; • English as a second or other language; • frequent interaction with low-achieving peers, for example involvement in gangs.	The learner: • is living independently; • has a history of abusive relationships or domestic violence within the family; • is in care or is a care leaver; • has a history of homelessness; • is receiving benefits; • is receiving disability living allowance; • is a teenage parent.	The learner: • is an unaccompanied asylum seeker; • has displayed offending behaviour and/or has had contact with the police or justice system; • has been previously identified as being at risk or vulnerable by a former educational institution or local authority.

Moreover, mentoring programmes under this framework should also focus on students whose families receive benefits and/ or who are eligible for free school meals, indicating a low socio-economic background. As new evidence suggests that socio-economic status is closely related to academic attainment (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, 2021), this means that shy pupils with a low socio-economic background are particularly disadvantaged. This is because these students find it difficult to participate openly in class, causing them to miss out on an important part of their learning and thus further reducing the likelihood of their academic success. Combined with the constant anxiety and fear of being approached by the teacher, this can lead to shy children having a lower opinion of their academic and school competencies (Rubin et al., 2009, p. 156). In addition, as teachers and classmates often assume that children are quiet in class because they do not understand and/or are not interested in the subject, this can lead to the belief that shy students are less intelligent (Coplan et al., 2011; Rubin et al., 2009). Altogether, this can reinforce negative feelings that shy children experience disproportionately, including negative self-perception and sadness (Crozier, 1995).

Research questions

Based on these findings, two key questions can be derived to help develop an evidence-based mentoring programme to strengthen the self-esteem of shy pupils. Firstly, the question of what exactly constitutes a close, growth-promoting mentoring relationship – as opposed to one that ends abruptly or fails to matter to either party – is still largely unresolved (Cavell, 2021, p. 291). The answer to this question is of enormous importance, as a mutually satisfying relationship can lay the foundation for further developmental progress, especially in the area of self-esteem. Secondly, this research aims to identify curricula, practice elements and structured activities which can mentors use to support the development of self-esteem in shy children. This underlines the problem-focused part of this work and focuses on making recommendations for best practices which are specifically tailored to the needs of the target group.

Methodology

The main quantitative research method will consist of questionnaires, targeted at Key Stage 4 students participating in an existing mentoring programme at Sedgefield Community College – the lead school in the Laidlaw Schools Trust. Since about 40 students participate in this mentoring programme each year, this will be the estimated sample size for this research project. The questionnaires will be used to identify the differences between mentoring relationships that tended to be close and supportive and those that ended abruptly or were not meaningful to either party. In doing so, this will provide answers for the first research question.

On the other hand, the main qualitative research method for the second summer research period of this project will be semi-structured interviews, which will be conducted with Heads of Year 7. This is because they can provide valuable insights about the needs of shy Year 7 pupils and existing support measures after their transition to secondary school. As there are currently three secondary schools in the Laidlaw Schools Trust, the respective Heads of Year 7 would make up my initial sample. However, if this sample size is not large enough to obtain significant results, the sample could be extended to include Heads of Year 8, as the mentoring programme aims to establish an enduring mentoring relationship, which is crucial for

the development of self-esteem (DuBois et al., 2011, p. 65). Overall, these members of leadership can provide valuable insights about the needs of shy Year 7 pupils, as well as the existing support measures after their transition to secondary school. This is in relation to the second research question, as the results can provide evidence for practices and support measures that can be implemented in the mentoring programme. In addition, their opinion will be sought on possible ways of implementing a mentoring system for these pupils, including, for instance, how many Year 7 pupils they consider to be shy and thus in the need of support.

Developing Evidence-Based Mentoring Practices

To achieve a close and growth-promoting relationship, the role of the mentor is crucial. Therefore, a problem-focused approach must include appropriate training for mentors, equipping them with necessary skill sets and treatment methods (Christensen, 2020, p. 968) for interacting with shy pupils, who are often afraid or nervous in the company of others, and tackling low-self-esteem. This means that mentors have to be aware of the crucial importance of relationship building in dealing with shy students, who find it difficult to converse with an unfamiliar adult. Hence, mentoring may involve the use of dialogue journals, which would pose an icebreaker question for the mentor such as, ‘Who are your heroes and why?’ or ‘What is the bravest thing you have ever done?’. Next, the student would read the answer and answer the question for himself, and, furthermore, may ask the tutor a follow-up question. In this way, a conversation is stimulated and both parties get to know each other better, which makes it easier to build a relationship of trust. In terms of self-esteem development, the mentor may choose from a further range of pre-planned activities, such as ‘Developing a Me Poster’ or ‘Constructing a Happiness is… Booklet’ (King et al., 2002, pp. 294-295). In doing so, 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-models (Bean, 1992).

However, when implementing a problem-based mentoring programme, practitioners should be wary of creating overly rigid or prescriptive curricula. This is because strict guidelines may hinder the relationship building process, which greatly benefits from a naturally flowing conversation and other activities introduced at the mentor’s initiative.

These components are indispensable for achieving mutually satisfying interactions and thus realise our essential capacity for affiliation, which plays a central role in facilitating effective problem-focused interventions. Overall, it is crucial in every mentoring relationship to strike a balance between delivering targeted interventions and building rapport with the mentee – two approaches to mentoring which compliment rather than contradict each other (Christensen, 2020).

However, before a problem-focused mentoring programme can take place, shy students must first be identified. As there are several reasons for a pupil to be quiet or withdrawn that have nothing to do with shyness, psychometric tests can be used to determine the level of shyness in children. For example, as means and time for this process will be limited, this can include the 'Children's Shyness Questionaire' (Crozier, 1995). This self-reported measure poses 26 questions and statements for pupils to answer with 'Yes', 'No' or 'Don't know', including 'I feel shy when I have to read aloud in front of the class' and 'I say a lot when I meet someone for the first time'. Furthermore, teachers may be consulted to determine a set of quiet pupils who may be asked to complete this questionnaire and thus determine their level of shyness. In fact, the questionnaire may also be used as a measure of effectiveness at the beginning and the end of the programme. In the same way, global self-esteem can be measured with the help of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). This questionnaire is made up of ten statements, such as 'I take a positive attitude towards myself', which can be answered with 'Strongly Agree', 'Agree', 'Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree'. Both psychometric tests are available at no extra cost and comply with UK norms (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021c), wherefore they would also be suitable for use in a mentoring programme.

Conclusions so far and Issues Remaining to be Addressed

In summary, the problem-based mentoring approach shows promising results and, together with the new typology by Cavell et al. (2021), has initiated a shift towards alternative, more effective models. With respect to shy pupils, this can involve built-in practices and activities targeted at developing their global self-esteem. However, it is important not to design too rigorous curricula, as this can prevent the development of a close, trusting mentor relationship. This 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. In fact, this 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" (Rubin et al., 2009, p. 157), which, in turn, argues for mentoring after their transition to secondary school.

Nevertheless, the extent to which specifically 'transitional mentoring programmes' can help shy pupils remains one of the issues to be discussed. This is because, by definition, these programmes often provide relationships of shorter duration and therefore less closeness, which may not adequately address the development needs of shy children. Furthermore, while the role of the mentor is predominantly taken up by volunteers in the US (Randolph and Johnson, 2008), there is no such trend in the United Kingdom, as the number of mentoring programs outside the US is limited (Marino et al., 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to determine who will take on this role in a future mentoring program in a Laidlaw academy or other schools in the UK. Finally, the different areas of self-esteem, such as physical, social or academic self-perception, also represent an issue remaining to be addressed.

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