

REVIEWING INNER MECHANISMS: YOUTH MENTORING

Introduction

Mentoring is one of those bright ideas that take a periodic grip on the imagination of the policy community. Everyone appreciates that one learns from experience and so much the better if one can trade on the wisdom of others. Here, then, is the kernel of the mentoring movement. Creating a close relationship with a knowledgeable guide is seen as an all-purpose resource offering both opportunities for advancement and solutions to disadvantage. These are the small beginnings of a brain-child that has grown up in many social and public policy homes from the prison wing to the boardroom, and from the maternity ward to the hospice.

Because of this ubiquitous quality, and because of the surface plausibility of its primary theory, a review in the area of mentoring is selected as the second example of realist synthesis. Whilst there is not quite the moral press of the Megan's Law example (Chapter 5), there is certain messianic quality about the literature with which the reviewer has to contend. The primary research, moreover, is huge in proportion, wide-ranging in method, and all over the place in quality, presenting a veritable dog's dinner of evidence for the synthesizer to chew upon. Then there is the nature of the intervention itself. Put simply a 'relationship' is the intervention. Accordingly, mentoring programmes are essentially spontaneous, decidedly mixed term and usually in a state of flux. This is no 'treatment' and the great challenge for the reviewer is to pierce the inner mechanisms, to try and discover what really goes on in a mentoring relationship. Finally, there is the issue of joined-up thinking. Mentoring is often offered as part of a wider package of interventions, and attribution can be problematic. For all of these reasons, mentoring is a promising subject for the realist reviewer.

Again, I emphasize that because of space restrictions this chapter is a synopsis of a much, much longer review, and concentrates entirely on evidence about youth mentoring – the pairing of disadvantaged and, often, disaffected youth with an experienced adult. This is perhaps mentoring's most challenging task and it throws into relief the kinds of social forces that a relationship has to withstand if it is to succeed. The original review also examined other kinds of pairings, the better to understand the dynamics of partnerships. Here, however, this evidence on youth-on-youth peer support, workplace mentoring, and self-help interventions to support the ill is omitted.

Note also that, as in Chapter 5, the full methodological regalia of realist synthesis are not on display. The focus is on analysis, and the line of development through theory-articulation to theory-testing to theory-refinement is clearly on show. This chapter also finds space for a fuller exposition of the primary research in order to give a sharper indication of the nature of the extraction phase in realist synthesis. Each primary study is subject to basic exposition, quality appraisal, and data (re)analysis as

part and parcel of the synthesis. Discussions on the search for and selection of material are omitted.

📖 Supplementary reading. The 'full' review: R. Pawson *Mentoring relationships: an explanatory review* is included in the web page support materials. 🏠

A theory of youth mentoring

In Stage one of realist synthesis the ground is cleared and terms of reference are defined, and these preliminaries are executed alongside an initial consultation of the literature. I have already indicated the broad and high expectations for close and caring mentoring partnerships but, clearly, there are an infinite number of ways in which such newly-honed, one-to-one, open-ended relationships may operate and develop. Equally clearly, the precise way in which the mentoring bond is configured will make a potential difference to any outcomes. So what initial sense of mentor and mentee interactions does one derive from the literature?

As a pilot exercise I pulled together a rough and ready inventory of the way researchers have described the activities that take place under the name of mentoring. It is a rather daunting compendium. Mentoring, it seems, may be any of the following: helping, coaching, tutoring, counselling, sponsoring, befriending, bonding, trusting, role-modelling, mutual learning, direction-setting, progress-chasing, sharing experience, respite provision, sharing a laugh, widening horizons, resilience-building, showing ropes, informal apprenticeships, providing openings, kindness of strangers, sitting by Nellie, treats for bad boys and girls, the Caligula phenomenon, power play, tours of middle class life, and so on and so forth.

It seems that all human life lurks in this catalogue and I have made no attempt to tame it in this list, other than to register towards the end that some commentators discern a dark side to mentoring. There is, however, no utility in research or policy terms in the message that success in mentoring lies in the balance of scores of such little imponderables. So are there some shared themes, some core properties, some common denominators that underlie a successful relationship and contribute to successful mentoring programmes? This brings the reviewer to the exercise in theory mining, digging through the literature for key terms, abstract ideas, middle-range theories and hypotheses that might provide explanatory purchase on the multifarious differences identified in the preceding paragraph.

The results of that exercise are summarized in Figure 6.1 which presents an initial model of how youth mentoring may work. The starting point, already established, is that there are many different objectives and many different modes of mentoring. The conceptual literature has tried to capture this diversity in a number of typologies of the forms of mentoring. Best known perhaps is Kram and Isabella's (1985) distinction between 'career', 'psycho-social' and 'role model' mentoring. The first consists of aptitudinal coaching in relevant tools-of-the-trade. The second operates in the affective domain, encouraging the mentee into emotional equilibrium. The third marshals the combined forces of leading-by-example and following-the-leader. Another venerable, and perhaps self-explanatory, distinction that crops up in the mentoring literature is that between 'formal' and 'informal mentoring' (Noe, 1988). One of the best known expositions of the merits of youth mentoring (Freedman, 1993)

keys into this same distinction, advocating ‘voluntarism’ (over state provision) as the key motor of mentoring.

Further adaptations of these ideas by Phillip and Hendry (2000) and Colley (2004) create another raft of useful distinctions such as that between ‘engagement mentoring’, ‘achievement mentoring’ and ‘identity mentoring’. Identity mentoring operates through emotional contact and befriending, supporting and cultivating the ideas of mentees, particularly in terms of how they see themselves. Achievement mentoring promotes gains in status by fostering and assisting in the development of qualifications, skills and job opportunities. Engagement mentoring is an ambitious combination of the two, nurturing the hardest-to-reach youth, and aspiring to wholesale gains in both fortitude and fortune.

These classifications are borrowed and adapted in Figure 6.1, which is an attempt to tease out the inner workings of mentoring schemes designed to promote engagement. An initial theory is put forward in answer to the question, ‘what does it take to engage the disengaged, what form must mentoring take to achieve this task?’ The young person at whom engagement mentoring is aimed is located at the bottom left of the figure. In the UK many such programmes are aimed at youth captured by the acronym NEET – Not in Education, Employment or Training. These young people are not only outsiders on these measures; they are also likely to be disaffected and disengaged, and may well be hostile to the whole ‘system’, which they perceive to be responsible for their plight. The model in Figure 6.1 goes on to hypothesize how a mentoring programme might work to address their actual and perceived exclusion from mainstream society.

It is assumed that there will not be one almighty leap into training, employment and equanimity, but that mentoring will facilitate this in different modes and by stages:

1. Befriending: creating bonds of trust and the sharing of new experiences so that the mentee recognizes the legitimacy of other people and other perspectives.
2. Direction-setting: promoting further self-reflection through the discussion of alternatives so that mentees reconsider their loyalties, values and ambitions.
3. Coaching: coaxing and cajoling the mentee into acquiring the skills, assets, credentials and testimonials required to entry the mainstream.
4. Sponsoring: advocating and networking on behalf of the mentee to gain the requisite insider contacts and opportunities.

These four steps are depicted as the upward column of arrows in the figure. The expectation is that clambering through them will encourage a parallel, step-wise set of changes in the disposition and position of the mentee. These shifting personal outcomes are summarized in the rolling sequence of attributes in the left-hand column of the model.

This is the framework of the programme theory to be tested, but it is only the chassis, since this is a realist review. It is assumed that the process articulated in Figure 6.1 will come to pass only in certain respects for certain mentors and certain mentees on certain mentoring programmes in certain social contexts. The basic model is thus buttressed by a series of hypotheses and questions about limiting conditions, which are summarized in the six bullet points on the right-hand side of the figure. These

introduce a series of caveats, which on closer investigation will allow us to better capture the factual scope of a policy passion.

FIGURE 6.1 ABOUT HERE

Before taking this model back to the primary studies, it is worth issuing a brief methodological aside about its status. The framework and theories are drawn from the literature but, unlike the initial Megan's Law model in Chapter 5, they are not derived from 'official expectations'. Many of its ideas are to be discovered directly in programme rubric but in the last analysis it is my model, my distillation of some of the key ideas that inform both the construction *and* critique of such programmes. It would be perfectly possible to commence the review with a somewhat different, but entirely legitimate, set of questions. The point to be stressed is that the review does not set out to prove or disprove the model, but to refine it. The justification for the initial hypotheses, therefore, is that they are sufficiently close to the extant ideas on youth mentoring, and sufficiently complex to recognize the intricacy of the task, for their interrogation to be informative for the policy and practice community. The other characteristic of the model, as in all realist syntheses, is that it employs sufficiently abstract middle-range terms to be testable via a range of primary inquiries, employing quite different research strategies.

The evidence – nine key studies

The following studies were selected purposively, as an optimal set capable of putting to test the review theory. All cover programmes that deal with disaffected, high-risk youth, attempting to move them into the mainstream via value *and* positional shifts. But, to repeat for emphasis, this review is not a synthesis of youth engagement mentoring as such. In the realist approach the studies are interrogated for what they say about the inner mechanisms of engagement mentoring. They are dissected in order to throw light on the precise changes engendered in successful youth mentoring, on what the relationship must contrive to do to bring about change, and on who is best placed to deliver and receive the apparatus of change.

Study 1: de Anda, D. (2001) 'A qualitative evaluation of a mentor program for at-risk youth: the participants' perspective', *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 18(2): 97-117.

This is an evaluation of project RESCUE (Reaching Each Students Capacity Utilizing Education). Eighteen mentor-mentee dyads were investigated from a small, incorporated city in Los Angeles with high rates of youth and violent crime. The aims of the programme are described in classic engagement terms:

The purpose of this relationship is to provide a supportive adult role model, who will encourage the youth's social and emotional development, help improve his/her academic and career motivation, expand the youth's life experiences, redirect the youth from at-risk behaviours, and foster improved self-esteem (p.98).

A curious, and far from incidental point, is that the volunteer mentors on the programme were all firefighters.

It is a qualitative evaluation involving group interview data and case studies. There is a claim in the abstract that the mentees are shown to secure ‘concrete benefits’, but these are mentioned only as part of the case study narratives, and there is no attempt to measure inputs, outputs and outcomes. The findings are, in the author’s words, ‘overwhelmingly positive’. The only hint of negativity comes in a reply to a questionnaire item about whether the mentees would like to change anything about the programme. ‘All but three mentees answered the question with a “No” response. But two of these malcontents merely wanted more “outings” and the third, more “communication”’.

In quality appraisal terms the research could be discounted as sappy, feel-good stuff, especially as all of the key case study claims are in the researcher’s voice. For example, ‘the once sullen, hostile, defensive young woman now enters the agency office with hugs for staff members, a happy disposition and open communication with adult staff members and the youth she serves in her agency position’. The case studies, do however, provide a very clear account of an unfolding sequence of mentoring mechanisms that evoke closely the core of Figure 6.1:

Joe had been raised in a very chaotic household with his mother as the primary parent, his father’s presence erratic... He was clearly heading towards greater gang involvement... He had, in fact, begun drinking (with a breakfast consisting of a beer), demonstrated little interest in school and was often truant... The Mentor Program and the Captain who became his mentor were ideal for Joe, who had earlier expressed a desire to become a firefighter. The mentor not only served as a professional role model, but provided the nurturing father figure missing from his life. Besides spending time together socially, his mentor helped him train, prepare and discipline himself for the Fire Examiners test. Joe was one of the few who passed the test (which is the same as the physical test given to firefighters). A change in attitude, perception of his life, and attitudes and life goals was evident... [further long, long story omitted] He also enrolled at the local junior college in classes (e.g. for paramedics) to prepare for the firefighters’ examination and entry into the firefighters academy. He was subsequently admitted to the fire department as a trainee [my insertion] (p.111).

This extract provides confirmation of the ‘long moves work by little steps theory’. All the attendant mechanisms are mentioned, moving from befriending to direction setting to coaching to sponsoring. Another interesting datum for the review is that this particular mentor (‘many years of experience training the new, young auxiliary firefighters as well as the younger Fire explorers’) was quite uniquely positioned. As Joe climbs life’s ladder away from his morning beer, the Captain is able to provide all the resources needed to meet all his emotional, attitudinal, aptitudinal, and training needs. This evidence gives the lie to two proto-theories about the rarity of the complete sequence and about the limited compass of mentor resources. The typicality of these achievements and supporting conditions is, of course, a moot point and a worry acknowledged by de Anda only in the final moments of the paper.

The study does, however, provide two more defensible claims, indeed ones that square with the initial hypotheses. There is a constant refrain about precise

circumstantial matches and points of interpersonal congruity being required to provide the seeds of change:

It was at this point [end of lovingly described string of bust-ups] that Gina entered the Mentor programme and was paired with a female firefighter. The match was a perfect one in that the firefighter was seen as ‘tough’ and was quickly able to gain Gina’s confidence [my insertion] (p.110)

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

Read at face value, this study tells us that engagement mentoring works. Read critically it screams of bias. Read synthetically, there is nothing in the account to suggest a general panacea and much to suggest a special case. The key point, however, is that some vital explanatory ingredients (well-positioned mentor, established community base, specific interpersonal connections, holistic programme) can be extracted and taken forward in the review.

Study 2: Colley, H. (2003) ‘Engagement mentoring for socially excluded youth: problematising an ‘holistic’ approach to creating employability through the transformation of habitus’, *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 31(1): 77-98.

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

To be honest, I think anyone who’s in my position with meeting people, being around people even, I think a mentor is one of the greatest things you can have ... [passage omitted]. If I wouldn’t have had Pat, I think I’d still have problems at home ... You know, she’s put my life in a whole different perspective (p.85).

Adrian was sacked from the scheme after 13 weeks. He was placed in an office as filing clerk and dismissed because of lateness and absence. Colley reports that, despite his profuse excuses, the staff felt he was ‘swinging the lead’. His mentor figured otherwise: ‘Pat, a former personnel manager and now student teacher, was concerned that Adrian had unidentified learning difficulties that were causing him to miss work

though fear of getting things wrong. She tried to advocate on his behalf with New Beginnings staff, to no avail'. At this point Adrian was removed from the scheme.

Another story betrays an equivalent pattern, with the mentor supporting the teenage mentee's aspiration to become a mother and to eschew any interest in work (and thus the programme). From the point of view of the review theory, there is an elementary fit with the idea of the difficulties entrenched in the long move. Mentors are able to provide emotional support and a raising of aspirations but cannot, and to some extent will not, provide advocacy and coaching. On this particular scheme, the latter are not in the mentor's gift but the responsibility of other New Beginnings staff (their faltering, bureaucratic efforts also being briefly described).

What of quality appraisal? Colley displays the ethnographer's art in being able to bring to life the emotions described above. She also performs ethnographic science in the way that these sentiments are supported by apt, detailed and verbatim quotations from the key players. Compared to Study one, the empirical material might be judged as more authentically the respondent's tale than the researcher's account.

However, then we come to the author's interpretations and conclusions. On the basis of these two case illustrations, the inevitability of mentoring *not* being able to reach further goals on employability is assumed. This proposition is supported in a substantial passage of theorizing about the 'dialectical interplay between structure and agency', via Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus', which is explained as follows:

...a structuring structure, which organises practices and the perceptions of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes (p.92).

Put in more downright terms, this means that because of the way capitalist society is organized the best this kind of kid will get is a shit job and whatever he does will be taken as a sign that he barely deserves that. In Colley's words, 'As the case studies illustrate, the task of altering habitus is simply unfeasible in many cases, and certainly not to a set timetable'. It is arguable that this interpretative overlay derives more from the author's self-acknowledged Marxist/feminist standpoint than from the empirical case studies presented. There is also a further very awkward methodological aspect for the reviewer in a 'relativistic' moment often seen in qualitative work, when in the introduction to her case studies Colley acknowledges that her reading of them is 'among many interpretations they offer'.

There are huge ambiguities here, normally shoved under the carpet in a systematic review. Explanation by theorizing, and an underlying constructivism in data presentation, are not the stuff of study selection and quality appraisal. Realist synthesis plays by another set of rules, which are about drawing warrantable inferences from the data presented. Thus, sticking just to the case study evidence in the review, it is a further exemplification of the 'long moves work by little steps' theory. It has particular explanatory value because it exemplifies in close relief some of the difficulties of long-move mentoring. In the accounts presented, the mentor is able to make headway in terms of befriending and direction-setting but these gains are stalled or even thwarted by programme objectives on training and employment.

The notion, implicit in the review theory, that there is some sort of linear ladder of engagement is thus called into question. There is a need to insert a supplementary hypothesis at this point about whether and in what circumstances befriending may create forms of self-reflection that serve to consolidate outsider status. At a slightly different angle, the study supports the review theory about the individual mentor's restricted resources and their limited capacity to compensate for lives scarred by poverty and lack of opportunity. But it also warns that the hypothesis about the need to 'call upon additional resources' is hardly straightforward and will be in need of further unpacking. These, rather than Colley's propositions about the unfaltering grip of capitalist habitus, are ideas to be carried forward in the review.

Study 3: Philip, K., Shucksmith, J. and King, C. (2004) *Sharing a Laugh? A Qualitative Study of Mentoring Interventions with Young People*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 60pp.

This inquiry compares three Scottish schemes. Two, termed the education and housing projects, use planned mentoring; that is to say, the contacts took place as part of the paid activity of a youth worker. The third, a befriending project, was undertaken by unpaid volunteers managed by a professional co-ordinator. There are further differences in organizational and funding arrangements, but the clientele and aims are considered sufficiently similar to make a formal comparison. The means to this end is another qualitative study concentrating on 'an account given principally through the eyes of young people of their experiences of mentoring within these settings'. The conclusions (p.50) are particularly useful for the synthesis as they too are an exercise in teasing out the scope of different mentoring relationships.

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

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

There seems an approximate fit with some of the review theories here. The befrienders (not surprisingly) have success with befriending and with 'providing a space in which to tell their [the mentees'] story and to rehearse what they would do

with their lives' (that is, direction setting). In contrast, befrienders were unable or unwilling to move on status matters: 'we are not an authority figure, we are not police, we are not social workers, we are purely there to give them a bit of fun and take them out of the home situation for a wee while'. This limited jurisdiction may, however, follow from the tender age of many of the mentees in this particular project. Thus before the review gets swept away with a 'befrienders can only befriend' theory, note that allocations on the housing project were 'generally in the 16-18 age group', the education project was 'for young people in the 12-18 age-group', and the befriending project operated for children 'aged 5 to 8'.

In line with the review theory, the professional workers attempt and appear to have some success as sponsors and coaches, but they do this in association with and, sometimes, after scrapping with, other agencies (compare Colley's hapless mentor in Study 2). However, it is claimed that they operate in this domain having first established high levels of personal rapport with the kids. This 'professional friendship' idea sits well with the initial model in that it recognizes that engagement is reached through progressive stages, but it sits uneasily with the sub-theory about the difficulty of a mentor being all things to one person. The report gives some detailed clues on why the latter might be viable in this particular intervention:

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

These conditions give a glimpse of some important individual and institutional contexts that may be required to sustain the progressive leverage of engagement mentoring. They are potential candidates for inclusion in the basic model of the mentoring relationship, on the basis of further investigation in the review. Whilst operating in completely different circumstances they do evoke some of the advantageous conditions pertaining in the RESCUE study (Study one).

Philip et al.'s research, however, is not unalloyed good news. It also plays particularly close attention to the roots of youth disaffection and thus to the stop-start mechanics of building up a mentoring relationship (a finding later reinforced in Study 6):

Striking a balance between raising false hopes and lowering expectations is a continuing issue for those working with vulnerable young people. However, mentoring processes may offer an opportunity to tackle this through building up a launch pad and safety net. However, this demands a long-term commitment on the part of mentors in order to support young people to feel safe enough to take risks, to fail and start again (p.50).

This evocation of perpetual strain and impending breakdown leads the authors to emphasize the importance of the role mentoring offers in 'bringing reliance to the surface'. This fits rather neatly with the review hypothesis that mentees only shift from antagonism to aspiration through the stage of acquiescence (the state of being prepared to 'hang in there'). However, this readiness to tough it out seems to hang by a rather thin thread. As one mentor puts it (p.40):

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

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

This research offers tell-tale signs of several shortcomings in the review's preliminary theory. It typifies the strengths and weaknesses of qualitative evaluation. It is strong on testimony, and the explanatory themes noted above are identified very clearly and supported in quotation after quotation, example upon example. Inevitably, there is no attempt to measure outputs and stepping stones on any of the dimensions identified; in this respect we are left with the authors' impressions that progress is made on one front, not so much on another, and so on. Frustratingly, very little use is made of its comparative structure. Three introductory sketches of the schemes are offered rather than any systematic comparison of processes, inputs and outputs. The synthesis needs further evidence on pattern to reign in these insights.

Study 4: Parra, G., DuBois, H., Neville, H. and Pugh-Lilly, A. (2002) 'Mentoring relationships for youth: investigation of a process-oriented model', *Journal of Community Psychology*, 30(4): 367-88.

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

Participants are enrolees in one of the USA's Big Brother/Big Sister (BBBS) programmes and aged 7-14, with 84 per cent from single adult homes and 69 per cent defined as low income (eligible for school lunch support). More about the BBBS participant profile will be revealed by subsequent studies in the review; here it is sufficient to note that they span a range of status backgrounds. Nothing is reported on their values, dispositions, identity or reference group on entry to the scheme, but it might be inferred from the usual BBBS long screening process that these are not

America's foremost rebels (see Study 7 for further details). The main results are presented in a path analysis format but the zero-order correlations in the following and simplified Table 6.1 provide the gist of the findings on what these youths value. Note again that these particular outcome measures are not about improved status via educational or behavioural gains, but relate only to 'self-reported benefits' and 'staying with the programme'.

So what do these kids like, and what keeps 'em at it? What the synthesis is looking for in these results is a quantitative footprint giving an indication that that certain elements of the mentoring relationship have greater pay-off than do others. Is there is a quantitative signature to match the process evidence discovered in studies 1 to 3? The simplest indication of what is important is contained in the significance levels reported as asterisks in the table. The quality of the mentor's training does not figure (small negative coefficients in the first row). These adolescents do not seem to notice or care much about their mentor's preparation. This contrasts, interestingly, with the mentors' perceptions in which there is a strong association (+ .31*, data not shown) between their perceptions of the quality of their training and their own report on the perceived benefits of the partnership. For the purposes of the review a blank is drawn on whether volunteers or professionals develop more productive relationships.

TABLE 6.1 ABOUT HERE

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

Perhaps the most useful results lie towards the bottom of the table. In general, activities (rows 11-13) seem to outstrip discussion (rows 7-10) in terms of perceived utility and tie to the programme. Mentees who report being engaged in a relationship based on plenty of sports/athletics are significantly more likely to stay with the programme. The study thus begins to pinpoint the precise nature of befriending that nurtures the long move in its formative stage. Non-directive, mutual activities in the form of basketball, music and retail grazing are the mundane starting points of relationship building.

The study is of use to the review in giving quantitative confirmation of the significance of some of the inner mechanisms of the mentoring relationship that, so far, have only been evoked in qualitative description. The exact nature of the continuing contact that follows on commonplace companionship nonetheless remains somewhat elusive. This study reaches to and beyond the limits of the survey method, and produces associations galore. However, it is very difficult to interpret because so

many of the correlations are rooted in self-reports about self-reports, and there is so much overlap (auto-correlation) between the so-called explanatory variables.

Study 5: St James-Roberts, I. and Singh, C. (2001) *Can Mentors Help Primary School Children with Behaviour Problems?* Home Office Research Study 233. London: Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate, 60pp.

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

The programme theory for CHANCE specified two stages or objectives for mentoring. The first was to 'establish trusting and supportive relationships with the children'. The second was the 'use of an individualised, solution-focused intervention...aimed to teach lifeskills which encourage independence, active learning and a sense of personal mastery rather than seeking to identify the original causes of the problem.' These correspond, most helpfully, to the emotional (befriending) and cognitive (direction-setting) stages of mentoring relationship that form the basis of this review.

The research involved an intensive process evaluation using semi-structured interviews with all stakeholders (management, teachers who made referrals, mentors mentees, mentees' mothers). There was also an outcome evaluation using a comparison group study of children with similar high-risk backgrounds. This part of the study examined behavioural change using standardized measures of school attendance, school exclusion and academic performance.

In the formative evaluation, the befriending goal is reported to have met with considerable success: children and mentors are shown, with some exceptions, to have got on very well. However, the individualized, solution-focused intervention goal was the cause of some confusion, summarized by the authors as follows:

To evaluate how successfully the solution-focused stage of mentoring was implemented, mentors were asked about their immediate and longer term-goals for the meetings and how the meetings were designed to meet the goals. Responses varied with some planning their meetings with specific goals and clearly working with a strategy in mind. Others appeared to turn up for meeting with little overall idea of where they were going or the steps needed to get there. Interviews with mentors identified some uncertainty in what to target and how to deliver the solution focused stage of mentoring. Some mentors saw themselves as the link between school and home, attended school regularly, took part in case conferences and had set up a close working liaison with the children's teachers. Others were uncertain how to help with schoolwork, how much to support the child or whether to support the mother in order to help the child (p.19).

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

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

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

Mentors generally met their children for two to four hours a week, usually a weekend morning or afternoon, giving an average of 120 hours over a year. The most common activities were walks, sports and activities in the park; visits to the cinema, theatre or zoo; home activities such as cooking (in some cases in the mentor’s home), puzzles, making things, computer games; visits to libraries and museums; and just talking. A few mentors involved their mentees in activities with their own children. Most mentors had regular contact with their children’s mothers (p.17).

These somewhat dismal findings throw useful light on the synthesis. The hypothesis states that unsuccessful outcomes follow from the application of inappropriate mechanisms. Here, a weak array of mentoring mechanisms is aimed at a tough task and outcomes flow accordingly.

Study 6: Shiner, M., Newburn, T., Young, T. and Groben, S. (2004) *Mentoring Disaffected Young People: an Evaluation of ‘Mentoring Plus’*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 92pp.

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

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

A key finding from the qualitative research relates to the nature of the mentoring relationship. Case after case points to the fact that the linear escalator of engagement not only gets stuck at intermediate stages but also tends to bump up and down on the journey. This can be summarized in a three-step model, described in enormous detail (not reproduced here) by the authors as follows (p.38):

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

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

This study also produced detailed quantitative evidence on impact, including the participant and non-participant comparison in Table 6.2. These and other data reveal a complex pattern of outcomes. The authors make two claims in particular, that:

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

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

TABLE 6.2 ABOUT HERE

There are attribution problems with this particular methodology. The comparison group is of young people who had initial contact but failed to participate in the (voluntary) programme. This is far from any common perception of a control group. Rather than a like-with-like comparison, voluntary self-selection could render this comparison as one between the aspirational and the antagonistic. Selection effects are the classic bugbear of quasi-experimentation and this *self*-selection effect may load the experimental group with the acquiescent and the aspirational who, according to the review theory, have better chances in the first place. Opting out of the programme might stem, alternatively, from being sufficiently in control to feel no need for it. Either way, attribution of these changes to the programme is dangerous. Be that as it may, significant gains in the direction of ‘inclusion’ are made by participants, and the research went on to investigate their own understanding of what was important.

Here lies a rather dramatic result: ‘overall the Plus element tended to be rated more favourably than the mentors’. The greater perceived utility of orthodox education and training provision is further evidence that mentoring alone rarely promotes the full range of engagement shifts in the review model. Study one showed how there can be tension between mentors and formal providers. In Study three, by contrast, professional mentors offered both friendship and a guiding institutional hand. This study, however, demonstrates that these are not the only permutations. Perhaps the most interesting fragment of evidence is on the synergy of the mentoring and the Plus elements. Table 6.2 shows that the greatest gains on the programme are made in terms of moves into further and higher education and, in this particular sphere, the mentors’ contribution (not shown in the data above) is rated at much the same level as the formal provision. This dual effect is illustrated in a vignette in which a mentor speaks about the confidence building that prompts and sustains the education hard slog:

She’s gained entry level one in Maths and English and we talked about level two and it was ‘no, I’m not doing that, that’s too hard’. Like at the presentation the other evening she picked up four certificates and I said to her ‘I’m really proud and are you glad you did it now?’ and she went, ‘yeah I’m glad’. And I said to her jokingly ‘well we’ll start that level two soon’ and she went ‘no’, but the next day she was on the phone, ‘I want to start level two, will you come and help me?’ (p.51).

Here then is a further refinement of the basic model. Not only is there a clear indication that mentoring fosters reliance by sheer persistence, the nature of mentoring support in promoting aptitudinal and positional support is also made clearer. The mentor’s role here, if successful, is likely to be in facilitative mode.

This study approaches book length and offers much greater detail on sub-processes and multiple outcomes than most of the others collected here. This review, therefore, is not exhaustive and further nuances, such as the limited impact on offending, are not reported here. Bulk does not make for perfection, of course, and there are the

inevitable difficulties in the study on matters of attribution and the meaning of some of the outcome measures.

Study 7: Grossman, J. and Tierney, J. (1998) 'Does mentoring work? An impact study of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program', *Evaluation Review*, 22(3): 403-426.

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

Taken together, the results presented here show that having a Big Brother or a Big Sister offers tangible benefits for youth. At the conclusion of the 18 month study period, we found that Little Brothers and Little Sisters were less likely to have started using drugs or taking alcohol, felt more competent about doing school work, attended school more, got better grades, and have better relationships with their parents and peers than they would have if they had not participated in the programme (p.422).

Moreover, its methodological credentials are often seen as impeccable. The research strategy employed is a 'field' version of a randomized controlled trial in which the core comparison uses 959 volunteers for the programme who are split into an experimental group and a 'waiting list' control. It is not quite clear what happens in the limbo of the queue but (self-)selection effects are minimized and, according to the authors, programme impact can thus be calculated directly because 'the only systematic difference between the groups was that the treatment youths had the opportunity to be matched with a Big Brother or Big Sister'.

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

Information on reference group positions and thus motivation on entry to the programme has to be gleaned indirectly (the authors are concerned only to control for this). The study, however, provides a footnote outlining a clear set of entry and eligibility requirements, and some vital clues on the participants' aspirations lie here. Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) screening involves: an assessment for a 'minimal level of social skills', ensuring that youths and parents actually 'want a mentor'; gaining the 'agreement of parent and child to follow agency rules'; the successful

completion of orientation and training sessions; and the fulfilment of residential and age limitations. After the induction period matching occurred, which itself was a prolonged procedure. Matching with a mentor was achieved for 78 per cent of the would-be mentees, with an average waiting time of 4.7 months, the shortage of suitable mentors being especially acute for minority boys, for whom the average delay was 5.9 months. In addition to these programme requirements, the research created exclusions of its own, namely for more than a hundred youths: with 'physical and learning difficulties' not allowing them to complete a telephone interview; those on 'special programmes' within the overall BBBS package; and those 'serving a contractual obligation such as Child Protection Service contract'. This welter of self, bureaucratic and investigatory selection is significant. It is not too brave an inference to observe that the programme and the research (and indeed the control group) dealt with a relatively compliant and particularly persevering set of mentees.

The report provides too much detail on programme impact to be easily summarized here, but a pattern of generally positive results across a range of behaviours is exemplified in a whole succession of tables. There is fluctuation, of course. For instance, in terms of 'antisocial behaviour', the programme generates significant reductions in the commencement of smoking and drug usage, and in the levels of 'hitting'. However, no effect is found for stealing or damage to property. Significant impact differentials are also reported for sub-groups (minority/white, male/female). Unfortunately, the sub-group analysis is only reported for the 'face-sheet' race/gender classifications, and the variables more directly indicating deprivation and detachment (for example, public assistance, domestic violence) are not used. A potential test of the differences between those making long and short moves up the ladder of engagement is thus omitted in the analysis.

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

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

And no such claim is made:

This study does not provide evidence that any type of mentoring works, but rather that mentoring programs that facilitate the type of relationships we observed in the BBBS program work. In our judgement, the positive impacts observed are unlikely to have occurred without both the relationship with the mentor and the support the program provided the match (p.422).

If an additional qualification – that BBBS only confronts a sub-set of disadvantaged youth – we are on the way to assessing the proper import of this study.

What remains is the important matter of the infrastructure supporting the mentoring relationship. Previous studies in the review have shown that the relationship with other parties and agencies is crucial to mentoring's success, and Grossman and Tierney's report ends with a description of some of the unique features of BBBS (pp.422-33).

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

This list arguably omits one of its key features. A glance at the history of BBBS shows that is a 'sturdy programme', surviving in different forms for a whole century (Freedman, 1993). This particular inquiry was only possible because it concentrated on those agencies, which were popular enough and had sufficient capacity to create a waiting list for places. In other words, it is a study of the sturdiest bits of a sturdy programme. Given the queue for places, it is quite likely that there was some local kudos in being a graduate of these particular schemes and, perhaps, that they were regarded as a passport out of social deprivation. Grossman and Tierney's caution on matters of generalizability is thus particularly well-founded, because there is a world of difference between repute on this level and that of being referred compulsorily to a small-scale trial of an untried government scheme such as that reported in Study 5.

Even though this reappraisal of the study has questioned some of the authors' conclusions and the general wisdom that has grown around them, the findings are not inconsistent with the overall set of hypotheses under review. Steady gains (or at least reported ones) in family relationships and educational success, and movement away from minor criminal behaviour, testify to the engagement of this particular group. Such transformations are easier for the well-motivated and there are grounds for supposing that this is the cohort being dealt with here. Mentors have generally been found to need considerable additional support, and this is evident even in the well-oiled BBBS programme.

Study 8: Rhodes, J., Grossman, J. and Resch, N. (2000) ‘Agents of change: pathways through which mentoring relationships influence adolescents’ academic adjustment’, *Child Development*, 71(6): 1662-71.

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

As we have seen in Study 7, before/after comparisons of the BBBS cohorts show a wide, if uneven, range of gains associated with the programme. Study 8 uses a method of analysis known as LISREL to arrive at a statistical model of the pattern of change in output and outcome measures associated with participation in the programme. This is reproduced in Figure 6.2:

FIGURE 6.2 ABOUT HERE

What the model attempts to do is to show which of these intermediate changes is direct or indirect, and give a weighting to the strength of that influence. For example, according to the upper portion of the model, mentoring does not influence grades directly (no arrow) but only by building a youth’s perception of his or her scholastic competence, which platform then goes on to influence actual school performance. Although they show very neatly the uneven and developmental nature of the changes associated with mentoring, these models are notoriously difficult to interpret.

There is no space to enter into all the technicalities of LISREL (which can be found in the full review). The reported coefficients are prone to minor variation according to how the model is configured, so it is often wiser to concentrate on parts of the more general picture obtained through such models. In this respect it is safe to endorse the broadest finding of the survey, namely that ‘the effects of mentoring are partially mediated through adolescents’ perceptions of their parental relationships’. This is a rather cautious and thus relatively safe inference, gained from a large sample of successful cases. It does not say anything about the actual process at work: the pattern is statistical, namely that the mentees who report a variety of educational gains (they value school more, they are less likely to skip class, they consider themselves to be improving) tend to be the ones who also report improved relationships at home.

It is this inference – ‘if parents feel involved in, as opposed to supplanted by the provision of additional adult support, they are likely to reinforce mentors’ positive influences’ – that I want to add to the review. A further reason why it is a safe inference is that it buttresses earlier, qualitative findings about successful mentoring relationships extending beyond the one-to-one and insinuating themselves into other

relationships and agencies. In particular, it gives support to the earlier illustrations about how the most able mentors can assist in hanging onto and building upon often tenuous family relationships (recall the 'World War 3' quotation in Study 3). It is probably one of the unsung early components of the affective relationship, marking the beginnings of the long haul of engagement mentoring.

This study thus adds a very specific piece to the mentoring relationship jigsaw. What is perceived in the initial review hypotheses as a process of personal change generated in the 'dyad' may well be rooted in the 'triad' (in this instance with other family members). The model of befriending as personal solace needs supplementing. A beneficial mentoring relationship is not just the medium of individual change, it is also the bridge into further successful associations.

Study 9: DuBois, D., Holloway, B., Valentine, J. and Cooper, H. (2002) 'Effectiveness of mentoring programmes for youth: a meta-analytic review', *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 30(2): 157-97.

This is a long, highly technical meta-analysis, pooling together the results of 55 experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations of mentoring programmes in the USA. As such it may appear a strange choice for inclusion in this theory-driven review. The purpose is two-fold. The first is to add to the technical range of studies covered. Realist synthesis tries to make sense of data patterns, be they found in primary studies (of any methodological stripe) *or* in secondary analysis. The second rationale is to demonstrate the idea of explanatory refinement. Because it operates at high levels of aggregation, DuBois et al.'s review throws up results that seem somewhat out of kilter with previous analyses. Can they be synthesized into an explanatory whole? In some cases, as the subsequent discussion shows, this involves the reviewer in re-interpreting or even discounting claims in the original research.

The meta-analysis draws on literature from 1970-1998 and aims to assess the overall effects of mentoring programmes on youth as well as investigating impact variation in relation to key aspects of programme design and implementation. There is evidence that mentoring programmes are effective, but impact is declared to be 'relatively small' or 'modest'. This result is estimated via several forms of the weighted and unweighted *d*-index, but in a more digestible form is rendered thus: 'the outcome for the average participant in a youth mentoring programme surpassed that of approximately 55% of the control group'. This indubitably tame influence is of no special interest to the current explanatory analysis, although entirely consistent with it. DuBois et al.'s net impact measure gathers up and pools together data on a wide diversity of programme goals, operationalized in 44 different ways. As such, the overall verdict melds together all manner of victories and defeats, and the analysis to date has taught us to expect net effects 'to crawl asymptotically towards zero' (Rossi, 1987; see Chapter 3).

The moderator and mediator analysis provides more analytic purchase in that it tries to provide statistical estimates of some of the characteristics of those programmes and personnel associated with the more positive effects. Two are of special interest from the perspective of understanding partners and partnerships.

- I. The strongest empirical basis exists for utilizing mentoring as a preventative intervention for youth whose backgrounds include significant conditions of environmental risk and disadvantage (p.190).

There is a suggestion here, much welcomed incidentally by the mentoring fraternity, that mentoring works best for high-risk youth. However, the statement needs careful unpacking, especially for the present review, in that it seems to run counter to some of the previous evidence showing the difficulty of ‘rags to riches’ mentoring. In terms of destination, the outcome measures for the youth in question include training and academic gains, and positive shifts on these dimensions are demonstrated in DuBois et al.’s analysis for the group in question (although the proviso remains about many of the primary studies using ‘perceived scholastic gains’ as the benchmark).

The crucial question is about origin: in what sense are these high-risk subjects? There is one sense, of course, in which all subjects in programmes such as BBBS are high risk in that programme publicity, referral and screening are usually directed at those with needs for the additional support that mentoring may bring. Within this group, DuBois et al. distinguish between those suffering ‘environmental’ and ‘individual’ risk, with the meta-analysis revealing that only the former reap the enhanced gains. Operational definitions are not provided in the journal report but convention suggests that environmental risk might be measured in terms of demographic location within deprived groups as measured by poverty, race, welfare support, parental circumstances and so on. Individual risk is often located within a record that includes elements such as behavioural disruption, substance abuse, criminal activity, and being a victim of abuse. In this respect, the review hypothesis about the relative rarity of engagement for high-risk youth with behavioural problems (as well as the evidence on this score from Study 5) is supported.

This leaves us with the positive evidence for the ‘environmental risk only’ sub-group. Whilst it is reasonable to suppose that they are high risk in demographic terms, we do not know whether this is the case in terms of aspirations and dispositions. Several authors have criticized the evaluations of BBBS interventions for not acknowledging sufficiently the ‘filtering out’ of unmotivated families and young people (Lucas and Liabo, 2003). As noted in the discussion of Study 7, there is a screening element often involving written elements, referral is controlled, and there is often a lengthy waiting list to start the programme given the perpetual problems of finding and training suitable mentors. The data required for meta-regression can only be obtained from large-scale programmes and so these features may well reoccur across the whole sample (see Jekielek et al., 2002 for a description of other major US mentoring programmes). Thus one way of accounting for the finding is that this sub-group of relative successes may be materially deprived but are also a forbearing lot who have already climbed a couple of rungs on the aspirational ladder before encountering the programme.

Yet another interpretation of the relative success of the environmentally deprived might be the classic floor/ceiling effect. Materially better-off youngsters have better ‘grades’ on entry and may have less room for improvement. Meta-regression cannot, however, provide an explanation for this particular association and we need to look elsewhere in the review for the appropriate clues.

- II. ...whether mentoring was provided alone or as part of a multi-component program was not a significant moderator of effect size. Similarly, neither the comparison of BB/BSA versus non-BB/BSA programs nor the comparison of programs according to psychosocial or instrumental goals yielded significantly different effect sizes (p.177).

All of these null results are surprising and run counter to some of the earlier findings. They are startling in that they seem to suggest that however a youth mentoring programme is packaged, it will have broadly similar and very modest impacts. They do not square with any of the previous analyses, which suggest that the sequencing of mentoring resources is vital. Reviews face such puzzles and contradictions all the time and it is important in an explanatory synthesis to be able to account for the discrepancies.

In this case, there is a methodological explanation and it is likely that the high levels of aggregation in meta-analysis account for the inconsistency. The 55 different trials are compared in terms of effect sizes and it will be recalled that the raw data that DuBois et al. use in coming to this calculation are based on different permutations of the 44 outcome indicators used in the primary studies. Variations in programme effect are then accounted for in the moderator analysis which itself takes into consideration 49 variables describing the myriad characteristics of the programmes. Each of these moderators takes a single and simple cut at the variable of interest. For instance, in the case of programme make-up, each trial is categorized as 'mentoring alone' or 'multi-component'. The result is that when it comes to making an assessment of the importance of a particular programme configuration, the meta-analysis is making a crudely drawn comparison assessed in terms of highly assorted measures.

Earlier case studies have shown that multi-component programmes take on a variety of forms. In Study 1, the different facets were embodied in the mentor. In Study 2, mentors acted as an adjunct (and seemingly in opposition) to a training programme. In Study 3, mentoring was carried out as an extension of professional youth work. In Study 6, there was a separate education and training programme, which mentors supported synergistically. In Study 7, case managers rather than mentors were tasked with weaving programme components together. These studies show that one of the keys to youth mentoring lies in the ability to dovetail the components of engagement, and DuBois's aggregate data cannot make the subtle discernment to assist in such an analysis.

A similar question may be raised in relation to the apparent non-significance for impact of whether the programme was 'psycho-social', 'instrumental' or 'both'. Details are not given about how such a classification was operationalized but, again, this is a very tough measurement call; mentoring relationships develop and blow with the wind and this key function might be better judged at the level of individual partnerships rather than a public statement about programme ethos. One suspects that the impact of these different mentoring styles is better interrogated by a locally sensitive analysis rather than the crude three-fold distinction. This conclusion is reinforced by a further, contradictory result from the meta-regression. One recommendation of the authors is that the use of 'mentors with a background in a helping role or profession (e.g. teacher) tends to be associated with positive results'. Note that this positive mediator suggests, in contrast to the previous classification,

that mentors capable of providing instrumental assistance may have more clout than those trading on psycho-social loyalties. Like much of the rest of the telescopic analysis, this remains an interesting possibility but one which it would be unwise for decision-makers to follow *carte blanche*.

Conclusion

This synthesis is selective and theory-driven in highlighting the particular role played by the basic orientation of the mentor and mentee, and the nature of their relationship. Quite diverse research studies have been brought into the analysis by concentrating on this particular theoretical thread, and by pulling out the empirical evidence that relates to some simple hypotheses about different mentoring relationships and for whom and in which circumstances they function (Figure 6.1).

The review thus moves, in realist synthesis style, from some knowledge to more knowledge and the findings are expressed, quite deliberately, in the form of a model (Figure 6.3). It takes the form of a diagram of the pathways that youth mentoring has to take if it is to realize its most daunting ambition of engaging with disaffected youth and reintegrating them into the mainstream world of education and work. The balance of evidence is that this ultimate goal is met infrequently and only in the special circumstances described in the model. The model itself is expressed as a network of flows, blockages and slippages. The metaphor of snakes and ladders comes to mind in representing the ups and downs of a mentee's progress, but we shall continue in more prosaic fashion, with four concluding bullet points:

- Starting at the bottom left of the diagram, the model remains faithful to the initial idea that in order to fulfil the overall ambition of engagement a mentor must accomplish a whole set of functions, summarized and simplified as befriending, direction-setting, coaching and sponsoring. The evidence shows that moving up this ladder gets progressively more difficult and many relationships get no further than a close bonding based on the sharing of mundane activities. The arrows decline in volume as an indication of this waning effect (it is not possible, however, for this or any other review to quantify this diminution of outputs and outcomes). There are positive exceptions, in that some programmes report a solid ascent from emotional and cognitive gains and into skill and career progression for a significant number of mentees. Such progress, however, is much more likely for mentees who arrive in a programme with in-built resilience and with aspirations about moving away from their present status. Whether this is considered a success story or a soft target depends on the overall objectives of a programme.
- Turning to the second column, one sees that mentee progress is not only halting, it is non-linear. Given the circles in which they move, many disadvantaged young people have frequent and repetitive battles with authorities, bust-ups with family, and brushes with the law. In such circumstances (the lightning symbol) mentoring relationships will tend to collapse along with everything else. Accordingly, the best available micro-data on the mentoring relationship reveal a persistent firefighting element. This rebuilding of mentoring functions also follows a stepladder of ascent in which relations of trust have to be regained, in which mentees are imbued with

resilience against repeated stumbling blocks, and in which they are instilled with confidence in the face of new hurdles.

- Turning to the third column, this indicates that the mentor's relationship is not just with the mentee. Mentors have to bring Mohammed to the mountain, but also vice versa. In respect of each mentoring function there exists a reception committee of other agents and agencies, and the function is better accomplished if the mentor makes steps to bring along members of that committee. Thus befriending and trust-building work better with, and to some extent through, the development of support to, and exchange with, the family and close friends of the mentee. In moving up the ladder, the mentor will parley with other members of the mentee's community and, after that, all manner of welfare, training and career guidance professionals. Bridge-building to other agents and agencies is shown to be a key facet of success. Clearly, different mentors will have quite different access to and experience of these different networks. There is some evidence to demonstrate the utility of having a mentor who has 'been there and done that', but in ransacking these studies it is rare to find cases in which the single mentor operates routinely across all channels.
- This leads us to the finding that mentoring works better if it is embedded in a programme offering further support, especially in terms of some of the loftier training and career aspirations of mentoring programmes. But once again, there is no given and guaranteed formula of 'mentoring plus'. Some studies show that relationships with other agencies can be marked by a lack of co-ordination or insufficient resources, or even mistrust and hostility. Accordingly, lightning can strike here too, and this may involve the mentor in a rather different round of firefighting with a rather different group of incendiaries (illustrated in column four). Here the literature describes another of the mentor's supplementary tasks, namely placating the various authorities of whom his or her protégé may have fallen foul. Needless to say, relatively few mentors will have the equipment or stomach for this battle and these interfaces mark another set of potential cul-de-sacs for the mentoring journey.

FIGURE 6.3 ABOUT HERE

Figure 6.3 and the four-paragraph summary above represent the conclusion to the review. It does not tell the policy-maker whether to buy-in or opt-out of youth mentoring programmes (it is assumed that this decision gets made on other grounds). However, it does try to encapsulate what has been learned about why such mentoring programmes work and why they fail. The conclusion is deliberately offered in the form of a model, in the belief that policy-makers think in model-building terms when they plan and develop programmes. They aspire to change. They know that change inches along. They know that a variety of pulls, pushes and supports is needed to sustain an intervention. Accordingly, the figure is a sketch map of the pathways along which mentoring flourishes or flounders, all of which need to be anticipated in the management of a programme. It offers a blueprint of the mechanisms that need to be embedded in the construction of a programme, in the selection and training of practitioners, and in the targeting and motivation of subjects.