CONSTRUCTING MEANING FROM MENTORING: 
THE EXPERIENCES OF MENTORS AND MENTEES

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I explored the experiences of four pairs of mentors and mentees who were part of a mentoring programme aimed at reducing truancy. I used in-depth interviews to gain insight into the complexity of mentoring relationships within this particular setting. The central focus of this work was to understand more about the processes of the relationship that occurred between mentors and mentees and the way the experience is made sense of by them. The findings suggest that factors such as the inherent assumptions of the programme, the expectations of the mentors and the responses of the mentees impact on feelings of satisfaction for mentors and the potential for developmental growth for mentees. I used the results of this study along with the current literature as a starting point to critique the underlying assumptions of this particular programme, to question the nature of successful mentoring and to explore the usefulness of socio-cultural theory as a perspective to add to our understanding of relationship dynamics within mentoring relationships. I suggest that this programme’s use of ‘friendship’ as a method of encouraging developmental relationships that impacted on truancy left mentors under prepared for their role and feeling confused. I draw on socio-cultural perspectives to suggest that relationship dynamics like negotiation, joint engagement and participation in activity are useful ways to encourage developmental mentoring relationships within programme settings.
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Chapter 1  INTRODUCTION

The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed.

Carl Jung

This project was inspired by enthusiasm and passion for opportunities that enable young people to move towards realising their potential. I began the project with an enthusiastic belief in the positive benefits that could come from using mentoring as a way of connecting adults to young people. I thought it was a great opportunity to encourage the development of youth potential particularly for young people who may not be reaching for all that they could.

While I had much enthusiasm and passion for the idea of mentoring I had little knowledge. I did not personally identity with a mentor figure and I had not been involved in a mentoring programme in any capacity so my personal experience was limited. The way I understood mentoring was based on anecdotal reports of transformative relationships for people who identified with having a mentor. I assumed the same kind of potential for transformation was likely to occur in mentoring relationships that were set up intentionally through a programme. It was from this position of vague understanding but keen enthusiasm that I began my journey into discovering more about mentoring.

As I began reading, the initial enthusiasm I had for the potential of youth mentoring began to fade. The literature revealed mixed views about the integrity of programmatic mentoring for the young people partaking in it. I was alerted to the potential challenges and difficulties of programmatic mentoring which I had not considered in the early stages of this project. I realised my initial enthusiasm was somewhat naïve and along the journey I developed a more wary and critical view of the topic.
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In the literature most of the outcome and evaluation studies had a favourable bias to mentoring and, despite less than significant positive results, on occasion still highlighted the potential benefits of its use as an intervention. Another strand of the research literature came from a critical perspective which critiqued the underlying assumptions of programmatic mentoring and viewed it more negatively as an intervention. A less prominent aspect of the current literature was research that focused on the actual relationship, especially in formalised settings, and the processes and dynamics that occur within it. There were a few studies from both positive and negative viewpoints, but I felt there was a need for further contribution in this area. I found that I knew little about why mentoring in a programme context was successful or not or what was going on within the relationship between the two people involved that might impact on the successfulness of the relationship.

There are a number of theoretical perspectives that contribute to understanding the potential usefulness of mentoring. Most of these come from developmental psychology. I brought with me to this work an understanding of development that has been influenced from my background studying Education, most notably by the writings of Vygotsky and his contemporaries on socio-cultural theory. While this perspective had been given some attention in the mentoring literature it was very scant. My initial thoughts about youth mentoring and the consequent reading I did prompted me to think that socio-cultural theory may have some application that could be useful in encouraging processes within relationships that promote the development of youth potential. Before engaging in a discussion of this kind, however, it was important for me to learn more about processes that did actually happen within mentoring relationships from the point of view of people who were involved in a mentoring relationship.

This was what I was really interested in, what happened in the “contact” and “reaction” between two personalities that might lead to “transformation”. I wanted to know more about the experience of being in a mentoring relationship, the way that experience was made sense of and what impacted on the sense-making process. I wanted to know the hopes, expectations and goals mentors and mentees had prior to the experience, whether these changed and whether they were fulfilled. I was interested in how mentors and mentees describe their experiences; what their feelings and thoughts were about the experience. I was curious about what they valued and liked in the relationship as well as what they found frustrating. I also wondered about what they gained from the experience, if anything and if the experience impacted on their lives and in what kind of ways.
These were the guiding questions that I went into this research with. Overall my intention was to come to understand in more depth the lived reality of the experience for the participants involved from their perspective. I believe that coming to understand the meaning mentors and mentees made from this experience was a useful way to develop insight about the process of mentoring and illuminate both the joys and tensions that may impact on the successfulness of mentoring relationships that are set up through a programme of some kind.

The area of interest I have stems from my preferred orientation to ‘coming to understand’, particularly with regard to learning more about people. I am inspired and stimulated by stories that illuminate the tensions, struggles, joys and wonder of lived experience. I am most interested in understanding the complexities of a few rather than the trends of many. I have chosen to do this research in a way that enables me to explore the kinds of things I am curious about in youth mentoring in ways that will provide me with satisfaction as a researcher.

I took the approach of in-depth interviewing with mentor-mentee pairs who had been or were still involved in a mentoring relationship. In this project I worked with four mentor-mentee pairs who were part of a programme run through a District Truancy Service. Young people were referred to the programme on the basis of truant behaviour and the focus of the programme was reducing truancy.

In the following pages I hope stories unfold that inspire the reader to grasp the complexities and intricacies of programmatic mentoring. I have been inspired and surprised through hearing the stories and coming to make sense of them. In retelling these stories my perspective has necessarily been woven through the interpretation. I acknowledge that my retelling is unlikely to be the only one possible and the reader may identify different retellings. However, I hope that the thinking and interpretation I have done here offers benefits from the insights the people in these stories provided me.
Chapter 2  LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I include a brief review of the causes of truancy from New Zealand and overseas literature. I then move on to discuss the current research about mentoring in the New Zealand context before addressing, briefly, the history of mentoring which has led to the rise of formalised mentoring programmes. At this point I have included a significant section on the current way mentoring has been theorised, which has contributed to the way it is understood as an intervention. At the end of this section I also introduce a different perspective which has had little attention in the mentoring field but which I consider to be a potentially useful theoretical perspective for conceptualising mentoring. In the latter parts of this review I discuss other perspectives which inform how mentoring is understood including outcome studies and studies focused on understanding the experiences of people involved in mentoring relationships. Lastly I discuss the scope of my research, and the ways in which it can build on existing understandings of mentoring.

2.1 Truancy

The mentoring relationships I studied in this project were initiated through a District Truancy Service (DTS) programme. The aim of the programme was to reduce the incidence of truancy for the young people involved. This necessitates a brief and focused review of the causes of truancy.

There is consistent agreement in the research that truancy is complex and influenced by multiple factors including individual characteristics, the family, the school context and the wider social context (Bell, Rosen and Dynlacht, 1994; Fergusson, Lynskey and Horwood,
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1995; Milne, Chalmers, Waldie, Darling and Poulton, 2002). Much of the emphasis in the literature has been on the individual and family characteristics that are common among young people who are truant (Fergusson et al., 1995).

Research by Fergusson et al. (1995) found that truancy occurs on a spectrum from infrequently to recurrently. Bell et al. (1994) also consider that truancy can be categorised into those who are “chronic” truants who are frequently absent from school, and those who are “occasional” truants who could be described as periodic ‘class cutters’. In one study of a birth cohort in New Zealand it was found that 40% of young people were truant at some point in their secondary education, which suggests that this behaviour may be part of adolescent developmental processes (Fergusson et al., 1995). However, there were also indications from this study that when truancy is recurrent and frequent there is a marked increased risk that young people will exhibit other problems (Fergusson et al., 1995). Other authors agree with these results (e.g. Milne et al., 2002).

There are common features among students who are truant in terms of individual and family characteristics. Bell et al. (1994) highlight studies which found that young people who engage in truancy often exhibit one or more of the following characteristics: learning disabilities, poor social functioning, engagement in antisocial or delinquent activities and low achievement at school. They also report that family processes have an impact on the truant behaviour of young people. Young people whose parents are overprotective, overindulgent and rejecting of them engage in truancy at a higher frequency. When alcoholism and abuse occurs in families it is likely to increase the rate of truancy. Low socio-economic status (SES) is also related to truancy, often because younger children are required to stay at home and look after siblings. Fergusson et al. (1995) found that the single strongest predictor of chronic truancy was family functioning, and secondly early conduct problems at age eight. They found that while academic performance and social demographic background were correlated with truancy, these were not predictive factors when family functioning was accounted for. Young people who engage in more frequent or severe truanting are at further risk of other developmental problems (Fergusson et al., 1995).

There is also research which focuses on the truant’s perspective. This research further illustrates the complex nature of this issue. Bell et al. (1994) summarise studies which have shown that young people who are truant report that they are bored and disliked by peers at school, experience an inability to feel part of the school culture and feel frustrated with the work because the school’s expectations are too high. One study by Zieman and Benson
(1981) cited in Bell (1994) revealed that students who were truant disliked their teachers and the authority the school had over them. In New Zealand an action research project inspired by the lack of student perspectives on truancy, found that the most common reasons offered by students for truancy were: staying home to finish assignments, exhaustion from their social life, paid employment or extra curricular activities, boredom (which the author tentatively interpreted as struggling with school work), disliking the subject or finding it too hard, and experiencing teacher relationship problems (Oliver, 1999). Four of these five factors are directly related to school functioning. McAlpine, Burke, Walker, McIlroy, (1998) also found that boredom (and they also associated this with other causes), teacher attitudes and bullying were associated with truancy.

McAlpine et al. (1998) found that students who persistently did not attend school became known as “hard core” truants (p90), when this was not an accurate representation. It was often the case that absenteeism was their only coping response to peer pressure, drugs, alcohol abuse, poverty and dysfunctional families (McAlpine et al., 1998). Coping, rather than rebelling, is highlighted in this instance. McAlpine et al. (1988) go on to suggest that truancy serves a communication function as it is symptomatic of unhappiness of some area in the individual’s personal life. The research interviews McAlpine et al. (1998) undertook revealed a diversity of reasons for truanting, from bullying to helping with family needs to health fears.

There are indications that teachers often assume that the family environment and individual characteristics of the young person are the primary reasons for frequent truancy (Kerslake and Lange, 1998). However, a study by Sommer (1985) cited by Bell et al. (1994) found that there were several factors within schools’ control which impacted on truancy, including attendance policies and monitoring, rules, curriculum and teacher characteristics.

As well as school systems, other authors have considered that wider social, economic and political processes have an impact on truancy. Hoyle (1998) and Gordon (1992) argue that education reform in the 1990’s created an educational market which marginalised some groups of society and made access to education harder to achieve. This has resulted in higher incidences of truancy for particular populations. As a result of education reforms in New Zealand, truancy has become an issue that is handled at school level by local school boards of trustees. However, school principals see it as a government responsibility to address the lack of resources and funding that are available for dealing with truancy (McDonald, 1994; McAlpine et al., 1998).
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Truancy interventions also reflect the multiple perspectives that inform an understanding of truancy. Truancy rates have been successfully reduced with interventions that have focused on either the truant individual (often in the form of modifying behaviour, attitudes and achievement) families, or schools (Bell et al., 1994). However there is growing recognition that truancy intervention may be more effective through multi-modal approaches which incorporate aspects of each of these three areas of intervention (Bell et al., 1994; Milne et al., 2002). There are some examples of multi-modal truancy interventions in New Zealand including Penrose High School’s focus on becoming a site for emotional and physical health as well as educational achievement; the Otago Wellness Trust which individualises holistic and innovative intervention plans for young people faced with serious disadvantage; and Tu Tangata – a programme which brings community resources into the school and strengthens the link between home, school and community (Loo and Trainor, 1999). All three of these interventions have shown promising results with truancy as well as bringing many other benefits.

One intervention used commonly in New Zealand schools is the DTS. While schools are free to develop their own truancy intervention programmes, and many do (Kerslake and Lange, 1998), a large number use the local DTS to follow up chronic and occasional truants. DTS’s are funded predominately by the Ministry of Education, with some funding coming from the schools and local community. The aim of the DTS is to reduce and prevent truancy by working with schools, families, the young people and other services or agencies which may be required. DTS’s are usually comprised of truancy officers who spend their time following up referrals from schools. The role of a truancy officer is generally to liaise with schools, work with families and work with truanting young people. Many truancy officers regard their job as much more than a “pick up and deliver” service (p58 McAlpine et al., 1998). While the truancy officers can work in with schools and families, they are not in a position to change school or family systems, nor are they trained counsellors or service providers for young people. Schools, however, do report success from utilising truancy officers (McAlpine et al., 1998; Rowe 1999). There is no research which indicates the students’ perspectives of the truancy officers, although some students did report being glad they were apprehended by truancy officers because appropriate support structures for their needs were consequently put in place (McAlpine et al., 1998).

Mentoring is also an intervention that has been used with students who are truant, and one that the DTS in this study used. It is hoped that through mentoring some of the characteristics
that have been identified as contributing to truancy will be alleviated, for example, limited social and academic skills and low attendance rates. Unless mentoring is combined with other interventions, however, it focuses solely on addressing the individual characteristics of the young person who is truants. Given that research favours a multi-modal approach for truancy intervention, it is likely that mentoring on its own could be less effective.

2.2 Mentoring in the Aotearoa/New Zealand context

Youth mentoring in New Zealand is a relatively recent phenomenon (Ave et al., 1999). It has not been used as an intervention with young people ‘at risk’ to the same extent as in the United States and United Kingdom. Research from British authors cite numerous health and education briefs from government agencies in which mentoring has become commonplace as a strategy for intervention (Piper and Piper, 1999, 2000; Colley, 2000a). Growing concern about the needs of young people considered at risk of failure in mainstream contexts has lead to mentoring becoming an increasingly popular means of intervention in many schools and communities in New Zealand (Evans and Ave, 2000).

Youth mentoring in New Zealand appears to be a diverse mix of school, corporate, government, community, and individual responses to perceived needs of young people in various localities. Diversity is a key word because youth mentoring programmes cover a broad range of initiatives, including school-based mentoring where older students work with younger students to help facilitate their transition to high school and the work load (Stewart, 2003); business partnerships with schools where a business offers the time of graduate recruits in a mentoring scheme as well as more senior staff offering skills in management to the school board (Legat, 2000); the government initiative of He Ara Tika, a programme specifically designed to target Maori youth (Stewart, 2001); various community mentoring programmes like the One-to-One programme operating in Nelson; and Graeme Dingle’s vision for young people that has become Project K in which there is a strong mentoring component (http://www.projectk.org.nz, 18/5/03). This is not a complete list of New Zealand mentoring programmes and does not include smaller community initiatives.

Each of the above mentioned programmes has different approaches, goals, organisation, training, and volunteers. This is likely to impact on the ‘how and why’ of their operation. For example, an in-school programme will have student volunteers with short, focused training to
work short term to help facilitate the transition of a new student to the school, while He Ara Tika seeks Maori volunteers who must complete NZQA qualifications and be prepared to commit to a longer period of involvement. While the type of programme is diverse in New Zealand, so are the ways in which each programme works, from recruitment of volunteers, the training and support provided, the aims of the programme and the duration of the relationships.

In spite of programme diversity, the basic structure of mentoring is that an older adult (or student) is paired with a younger child or adolescent to guide and support them in various ways specific to the programme. This mentor-youth dyad is the most common way mentoring as an intervention is practised in New Zealand, the United States and the United Kingdom.

Some New Zealand authors have criticised this style of mentoring as having an American cultural ethos, valuing an individualistic, single relationship over group or collective activities (Evans and Ave, 2000). Evans and Ave (2000) and Ave et al. (1999) both caution against the importation of American style models of mentoring into the New Zealand context. They argue that New Zealand has other institutions like the whanau, the marae, and the role of grandparents that could support a more natural and culturally appropriate set of structures which facilitate the same guidance and support that mentoring dyads intend to provide for young people. For example, in one programme included in an evaluation by Ave et al. (1999) the community chose to adopt a collective approach to mentoring in which groups of students undertook leadership programmes with a group of adults acting as mentors. This approach reflected the needs of both the prospective mentors and mentees. Evans and Ave (2000) suggest that developing youth oriented schools, supports, policies and environments which enable young people to have access to a multitude of mentors could be more appropriate.

There appear to be no studies in New Zealand that have explored in depth the experiences of mentors and mentees and grounded these experiences in theoretical frameworks. In one evaluation by Ave et al. (1999) case studies of a number of mentoring relationships were presented. However these did not provide insight into the processes that occurred for mentors and mentees or how the experiences were made sense of by them. The evaluation did provide evidence that mentoring relationships have the potential to impact positively on young people’s lives.
2.3 From ‘classic’ to programmatic mentoring relationships

2.3.1 Classic mentoring

The conception of a mentor as an older, wiser adult working alongside a younger ‘protégé’ to guide their journey into mature adulthood and personal growth (Rhodes 1994), has been termed a ‘classic’ model of mentoring by Freedman (1993). They are relationships that occur naturally, developing from “chemistry” between the mentor and protégé. Traditionally they are long-lasting relationships, with the mentor being ‘there’ for as long as the protégé needs. These mentoring relationships can be defined as mutual, comprehensive, informal, interactive and enduring. They are relationships in which the mentor has the ability to motivate the protégé to grow professionally and personally through integrity and high expectations (Hardcastle, 1988 in Lucas, 2001). The relationship between Mr. Miyagi and Daniel in the movie ‘The Karate Kid’ was like that just described. The older martial arts expert patiently guided the young and exuberant Daniel through the beginning of his journey into young adulthood. It was a relationship formed by Daniel’s desire to learn skills of martial arts that the old man had to offer, but it became a relationship that guided him through this transitional stage of his life.

Another model of mentoring, which feeds into the classic view, is skills or knowledge based mentoring in which a mentor is selected on the basis of possessing expertise in an area that is of appeal to the protégé. In the ‘Karate Kid’ it was Mr. Miyagi’s martial arts skill that drew Daniel to him. A relationship can be formed that is not reliant on initial attraction between the mentor and protégé but a desire to learn from a ‘master’. A study by Zuckerman (1977) found that many Nobel Laureate prize winners have had mentors, and become mentors in their field of expertise. A ‘bond’ between the mentor and protégé often develops as a result of participating in a joint activity that engages both the mentor and protégé (Gallimore et al., 1993). The relationship then becomes more than a transmission of skills and knowledge. In the close connection between mentors and protégés, a culture, a way of being, a way of thinking is passed between the two, mediated by their interest in the subject of study (Gallimore et al., 1993). Both professional and personal growth occurs within the context of the mentoring relationship. A relationship that began with unequal participants gradually moves toward equality through the improving influence of the mentor (Piper and Piper, 2000).
and the desire of the mentee to ‘be like’ the mentor. This was the case with Daniel and his mentor Mr. Miyagi in ‘The Karate Kid’.

In summary, classic mentoring relationships are naturally occurring, enduring, engaging for both mentor and mentee, involve participation in a mutually satisfying activity, provide guidance in either or both personal and professional growth, and in most cases seem to begin with a mentee’s desire to connect with a mentor.

2.3.2 Career mentoring

Career mentoring has been a popular means of professional development for the business and teaching disciplines particularly. The focus is usually on professional development and has less emphasis on personal growth, although often the two go hand-in-hand (Gibb, 1999). This model of mentoring is akin to the classic view in that someone who is usually older and more experienced takes on a newer member of staff to help develop their skills and knowledge (Gibb, 1999). The formation of these relationships may happen as outlined above where a ‘protégé’ draws closer to a mentor figure and looks to them for advice and support. These kinds of relationships may never be formalised, although, in some cases relationships are formalised as mentors and mentees are paired together.

2.3.3 Programmatic mentoring

Both classic mentoring relationships and professional career mentoring relationships have provided anecdotal support for the personal and professional gains that can be made from a one-on-one investment of time and experience from a mentor to a protégé. Freedman (1993) describes these kinds of mentoring as the first and second ‘waves’ of the mentoring movement meaning that these were the first ways mentoring occurred on a large scale. Freedman’s description of the ‘third wave’ of mentoring is the type that this project is concerned with, that is, providing programmatic mentoring for young people, often those who are considered ‘at risk’. One of the most significant differences between the classic definition of mentoring, and programmatic mentoring for youth ‘at risk’ is that the latter form of mentoring does not occur from the relationships that already exist in a young person’s environment, or relationships that the young person seeks out. Rather than relationships which
occur naturally for the young person, these are relationships that are “grafted” (Rhodes, 1994) onto the young person.

There are two main models of programmatic mentoring that are apparent within the literature. These are friendship based mentoring and engagement mentoring.

The friendship model has arisen from the Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) of America programme, one of the largest and longest running programmes in the United States. It was the first large-scale programme that formalised the mentoring concept. It has been operating for close to a century using a friendship model. The central feature of this model is that friendship is the framework through which the mentor can support and aid the youth (Grossman and Tierney, 1998). BBBS is not targeted at ameliorating specific problems, but rather providing a young person with an adult friend. The magnitude of the BBBS programme has meant that many other mentoring programmes use this model as a framework.

The significant difference of the engagement model is that there are specific goals and objectives of the programme that define the roles of the mentor as a ‘change agent’ and the mentee as a ‘person needing assistance to change’. This is a shift away from the general idea of a supportive, guiding adult that is prevalent in the classic notion of mentoring and the friendship model. The term engagement mentoring has been used specifically in the United Kingdom context to describe the way mentoring has been used as an intervention responding to young people who are targeted as ‘at risk’ of disengaging or who already are disengaged from formal education systems (Colley, 2000b). Mentoring in this model seeks explicitly to reengage young people with such systems to help prepare them for the labour market. Colley writes with particular reference to the proliferation of government funded mentoring programmes across the United Kingdom in the 1990’s that were responding to young people’s disaffection and social exclusion.

The literature indicates that the most common way programmatic mentoring is practised is not one or the other of these models but actually a combination of both. There seems to be a continuum of programmatic mentoring models that varies with the emphasis that is placed on building the relationship or achieving particular goals. There are conflicting accounts in the literature on the effectiveness of particular models. While the BBBS programme has been evaluated to show positive results (Grossman and Tierney, 1998) the engagement model has been critiqued from a less than favourable perspective (Colley, 2000a,b; Piper and Piper, 1999, 2000).
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Underpinning both the friendship and engagement models as well as the ‘classic’ image of mentoring is that in all forms mentoring is in essence a means for creating a context in which young people develop. However the optimal conditions for this context are different. In the BBBS model it is friendship and in the engagement model it is creating an opportunity for the specific objectives of the programme to be achieved. But in both these models mentoring is a framework for encouraging development through relationship with others. The theoretical roots for both models lie in human development theories such as attachment theory, resiliency theory, social support theory, social capital theory and social learning theory.

2.4 Theorising mentoring

2.4.1 Introduction

The increase of programmatic mentoring has lead to a mentoring discourse, or particular ways of thinking about mentoring in formalised contexts. This discourse ascribes meaning to the role of a mentor, the position of the mentee relative to the mentor and the purpose of mentoring in the youth mentoring context. Commonly the role of a mentor is represented as an interventionist, the mentee is positioned as ‘at risk’ and needing assistance, and the purpose is to encourage positive changes in the mentee’s life. This includes anything from decreasing school absenteeism to improving social skills.

The way mentoring has been theorised has contributed to the development of this discourse. Early research and practice was based in studies of human development and has roots in psychological principles (Lucas, 2001). From this a variety of perspectives have come to inform theoretical understandings of mentoring. These perspectives include: attachment theory, resiliency theory, social capital theory, social support theory, and social learning theory. However many of the underlying processes of these perspectives, for example, the characteristics of an attachment relationship, have not been adequately researched from a youth mentoring framework.

There is a critical perspective that also adds to our understanding of youth mentoring. It critiques the assumptions that can be inherent in mentoring programmes and suggests that programmatic youth mentoring often ignores the wider context which young people are part
of. This perspective argues that young people are positioned with a deficit orientation and that wider issues which contribute to the need for mentoring, such as poverty and the breakdown of families, are not addressed.

The following sections discuss the multiple perspectives which inform how youth mentoring is conceptualised and practised. Most common throughout the literature is a synthesis of multiple perspectives as a means of explaining the rationale for youth mentoring. By separating each perspective I am attempting to highlight the contribution each makes to the mentoring field, but I acknowledge that many of these perspectives are interrelated.

2.4.2 Attachment perspective

Attachment theory postulates that the individual’s journey from infancy to adulthood occurs within the context of significant relationships (Atwool, 2000). Attachment theory is most commonly referred to with regard to the early experiences of infancy and childhood. John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth were the pioneers of rethinking early childhood development and derived the theory and empirical research which led to attachment theory. Their theoretical and research work focused on how early experiences could affect the behavioural and emotional development of children (Bretherton, 1992). As research continued to develop in the field of attachment the implications of attachment theory expanded to a variety of areas including: adult attachment, adult bereavement, marital relationships, sibling attachment and the relevance of attachment theory to psychopathology (Bretherton, 1992). The significance of attachment in adolescence has also received attention. Some of the salient features of attachment theory have illustrated the importance of adults in young people’s lives. Consequently mentoring literature has used principles of attachment theory to justify the importance of mentors for young people who come from dysfunctional or solo parent families particularly, where it is assumed natural adult supports are not available.

Adolescence is characterised by a move away from central support figures (usually parents) as adolescents seek autonomy as individuals. There is a gradual shift from dependence on parents for providing primary attachment relationships to the more reciprocal offering and receiving of attachment from peers. This may culminate in a partnership which becomes the individual’s primary attachment relationship (Allen and Land, 1999). There is a large amount of research which suggests a healthy shift away from parents is most easily established if young people have a history of secure relationships (Allen and Land, 1999).
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During adolescence individuals develop a “generalised attachment stance” which is used when young people form new attachments as they move towards adulthood (Allen and Land, 1999). Attachment theory suggests that the basis of this stance is formed from early experiences in which ‘internal working models’ develop. Internal working models provide a template for which experiences can be understood, and, a model of action that can be used in similar circumstances (Atwool, 2000). For example an ‘internal working model’ may exist for the way we seek attention from our primary care-giver. If we use disruptive behaviour this may mean we get more attention so this becomes the model we use when trying to get attention from others. The internal working model an individual has of attachment forms the basis for interacting in other relationships, thus impacting on the transition to adulthood. Although internal working models of attachment are thought to be relatively stable over time, there is also the potential for them to modify or change in response to changing life circumstances (Rhodes, Grossman and Resch, 2000). Adolescence is also a period where increasing cognitive and emotional sophistication (Atwool, 2000) enable young people to view relationships from multiple perspectives (Rhodes et al., 2000; Allen and Land, 1999), to consider their own role in relationships and to make their own choices about how they want to act in relationships (Atwool, 2000; Allen and Land, 1999). These factors together mean that in adolescence there is the potential for internal working models to be revised (Rhodes et al., 2000).

The theoretical principles expressed provide support for fostering positive adult relationships in young people’s lives, especially for those young people who may not have developed an appropriate ‘model’ or way of relating to family, peers, teachers and others. A model of care and support offered through mentoring relationships may challenge the existing way young people relate with others in their lives (Rhodes et al., 2000). In this way the mentoring relationship can become a positive model of interaction for other relationships the adolescent is involved in and for future relationships.

There has been some research which supports these assertions. Relationships with parents were reported as being more satisfying by adolescents who identified having adult mentors, both in programmatic settings and as a natural support person, in their lives (Hamilton and Darling, 1996; Rhodes et al., 2000; Grossman and Tierney, 1998). However, as identified in the study by Rhodes et al. (2000), whether or not this was attained through the process of adolescents forming relationships with their mentors characterised by attachment is still unclear. There is no research that has provided empirical results showing mentoring does
defuse the likelihood of engaging with disruptive peer groups. Relationships with teachers also do not seem to improve as a result of a young person having a mentor (Grossman and Tierney, 1998; Jackson, 2002).

The predominant assumption when interpreting the usefulness of mentoring through an attachment perspective is that the young person has a strained, deprived or dysfunctional relationship with parental figures (Evans and Ave, 2000; Rhodes et al., 2000; Rhodes, 1994). Some mentoring research shows, however, that there is still uncertainty about whether mentors act to complement or compensate for young people’s relationships with parents (Rhodes, 1994). Work from Hamilton and Darling (1989) shows that naturally forming mentorships are more likely to occur for young people who report positive relationships with parents, particularly boys. However, other research shows that mentors do have the potential to become parental substitutes or fulfil “quasi-parental” roles (Blinn-Pike, Kuschel, McDaniel, Mingus and Mutti, 1998). There is the possibility of harmful effects from a quasi-parental relationship that could hinder the benefits derived from the relationship, particularly if the young person is seeking a more permanent attachment and the mentor moves on (Evans and Ave, 2000). This may further impress upon a young person that adults cannot be relied upon or that intimate relationships have disappointing outcomes, thus countering the effects of mentoring relationships from an attachment perspective.

Although attachment theory is used as one means of rationalising mentoring as a positive intervention for young people, the processes by which this occurs are still uncertain. The literature tends to take a general perspective of attachment. It focuses on the affirmative benefits of young people sustaining positive relationships with adults in the journey through adolescence to adulthood, rather than explicitly viewing the mentoring relationship as a secondary form of attachment relationship. Atwool (2000) for example, places relationships with adults in which young people can feel listened to, supported, able to participate in decision making, and where they can gain a sense of achievement, within an attachment framework. Notably, this way of thinking about attachment is somewhat different from the attachment relationship proposed by Bowlby and Ainsworth. Their primary focus was the relationship between an infant and its parents. However, it does suggest that attachment theory provides a theoretical base from which to explore the impact of mentoring relationships. Currently there is a need for more research which clarifies the underlying processes by which mentoring relationships affect a broad range of outcomes. Using
attachment theory as a framework is one way researchers have begun this process (Rhodes et al., 2000).

2.4.3 Resiliency perspective

In the early 1980’s the first results from a hallmark study undertaken by Emmy Werner and Ruth Smith were published. The study followed the development of a group of children for 20 years. Some of the children involved came from “vulnerable” backgrounds. The characteristics of “vulnerable” included: being exposed to poverty, family instability, and being raised by poorly educated parents with possible mental health issues. One of the discoveries of the study was that despite the existence of these factors some of the “vulnerable” children remained “invincible” and developed into mature, competent and autonomous young adults (Werner and Smith, 1982). The findings from Werner and Smith (1982) supported those from Garmezy and Neuchterlein (1972), and later studies from Rutter (1987). These studies all suggested that the presence of a good relationship with an adult, often outside the immediate family, can have a positive effect on the vulnerability of young people, decreasing the likelihood of more negative outcomes. This study provoked a flurry of interest into the resiliency of young people, and led to more research looking at the factors which promote resiliency, especially for young people who come from environments where there is a higher presence of risk.

There are three indicators of resilience in children and young people that have been emphasised in resiliency research since the Werner and Smith study. These are the individual’s characteristics, for example self-esteem or temperament, families that had fewer life stresses and could provide greater sources of support, and accessing a supportive person or agency outside the family (Atwool, 2000; Rhodes, 1994). These indicators complement the results of the Werner and Smith study, although Werner and Smith identified multiple factors involved with resiliency and vulnerability that later research places less emphasis on, for example, the age of parents at birth, the physical health of the child and parents, and the perception of the child by parents during infancy. In practice, resiliency research has been influential in the identification of protective factors which can be used as principles from which to implement helping programmes (Beier, Rosenfield, Spitalny, Zansky and Bontempo, 2000). Interest in mentoring programmes has been fuelled in part by the indication that
positive relationships with extra-familial adults promotes resiliency among youth from high risk backgrounds.

The importance of at least one positive relationship with an adult as a factor in the healthy development of adolescents is a beginning point in much of the mentoring literature (Taylor and Dryfoos, 1999; Grossman and Tierney, 1998; Blinn-Pike et al., 1998; Scales and Gibbons, 1996). As a result the concept of resiliency has become an integral part of the youth mentoring discourse and the rationale for interventions which incorporate mentoring as a full or complementary strategy in reducing the likelihood of negative life trajectories.

The resiliency literature has been based on young people’s self reports of adults who act in a supportive way during their development (Werner and Smith, 1982). This led to an increasing interest in discovering more about naturally occurring mentorships, of the type that seem to be prevalent in the resiliency literature. Relationships with adults which provide young people with consistent, emotional support when sought by the young person were described by Werner and Smith (1982) as a key feature of resiliency. Later research has labelled these types of relationships as naturally occurring mentoring relationships (Rhodes, 1994). Studies found the young people who considered they had a natural mentor, or supportive adult, fared better in terms of various factors. One study found that African-American teenage mothers who had natural mentors suffered less from depression than those without natural sources of support (Rhodes, Ebert and Fischer, 1992). A study in 2000 also showed that adolescents who cite having a natural mentor in their lives (although the mentors were not always extra-familial) were less likely to participate in smoking, heavy drug use, carrying a weapon, or high rates of sexual activity (Beier et al., 2000). Mentorships in the creative and higher academic field also illustrate the positive effects of naturally occurring mentoring relationships. Protégés often excel in the same field as their mentor and become recognised for their expertise. This has been the case with many Nobel Laureates including New Zealand’s own Ernest Rutherford. He was mentored by a former Nobel Laureate and went on to mentor a number of scientists who also became Nobel Laureates (Zuckerman, 1977).

It is unclear if mentoring relationships actually promote resilience, or if being resilient and having a positive mentoring experience are indicators of a third underlying factor (Rhodes, 1994). Werner and Smith (1982) suggest that resilient young people are more adept at seeking out the support they need. A study by Rhodes et al. (1992) of young African-American mothers showed that those with natural mentors were better able to develop relationships with formalised mentors.
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There is a scarcity of research which investigates the underlying processes of resiliency and how these processes may be replicated in mentoring programmes. One of the persistent assumptions of formalised mentoring is that the relationships are able to replicate those which occur in a natural mentoring context, thus providing the young person with a buffer against factors of risk. It is likely, though, that there are differences between these two types which will affect the nature and course of the mentoring relationship (Rhodes, 1994; Colley, 2000). The mixed and varied results about the effectiveness of formalised mentoring relationships (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine and Cooper, 2002) suggest that the differences between natural and programmatic relationships need further examination if programmatic designs are to be as effective as naturally occurring relationships seem to be.

2.4.4 Social capital perspective

Lee and Crammond (1999) consider that social capital theory is another way to explain the importance of mentors in young people’s lives. Social capital has roots in cultural capital theory. Cultural capital theory was originally understood to be attitudes and values implicit within the school system which form a “hidden curriculum” and which enable certain groups to benefit from education to the exclusion of others (Philip and Hendry, 2000). The implicit attitudes, knowledge and values have been termed social capital by Coleman (1994) and are considered to be essential, alongside financial capital, if young people are to succeed at school. According to this perspective, mentoring relationships are a way of passing on social capital from adults to the next generation, enabling them to develop the necessary attitudes, skills, effort and conception of self they need to succeed in school and later as adults (Lee and Crammond, 1999).

The founding ideas of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBS) illustrate the implicit emphasis of passing on some form of social capital through a mentoring relationship. The original idea of BBBS came from a perception in the early 20th century that young boys who were appearing in the court system could benefit from an adult taking a personal interest in them and providing them with a role model to help them become responsible members of society (http://www.bbbsa.org, 12/4/03). Sentiments of this kind often appear in the mentoring literature in various forms. For examples see the introductory sections of Lee and Crammond (1999); Taylor and Dryfoos (1999); Grossman and Tierney (1998); Royse (1998) and Dondoro (1997).
Underpinning the notion of adult support as a means of facilitating development in the social capital perspective is the assumption that young people are “deprived of opportunities to acquire and maintain coping skills necessary for life-long competence” (p161 Blechman, 1992). Therefore fostering mentoring relationships for young people is a positive course of social action and change. However this justification has been criticised on ideological grounds, in particular because it has the potential to maintain an existing social order (Piper and Piper, 2000), and because it focuses on the individual without considering the broader set of social, cultural and economic systems that influence development (Modell, 1994; Colley, 2000). It has also been criticised for the potential to continue to cover up wider social inequalities which create an environment of risk (Freedman, 1993) and that formalised mentoring in one-on-one contexts does not fit with ecologically valid approaches to social change (Evans and Ave, 2000). The social capital perspective appears to take a deficit view of young people and their families and assumes that these can be mitigated through mentoring.

Philip and Hendry (2000) offer a new angle on the social capital perspective. Philip and Hendry (2000) consider that “subcultural capital” is a means by which young people negotiate and accumulate status within their own social worlds (Thornton, 1995 in Philip and Hendry, 2000). This is a set of skills and knowledge, a “degree of street wisdom” (p213) which enables young people to own knowledge and negotiate control over their immediate social contexts in which they encounter opportunities, risks and decisions, for example the playground and street ‘hang out’ sites. Philip and Hendry suggest it is in this arena that mentoring relationships may offer a means for young people and adults to form new kinds of supportive relationships. In this way mentoring is a highly reciprocal process because adults also gain a form of ‘capital’ in terms of their understanding of young people’s experiences.

This theory from Philip and Hendry (2000) suggests that it is possible for different kinds of social capital to be gained from being part of a mentoring relationship for both the mentor and the young person. It would seem though that this process requires a particular way of viewing the young person and the “subcultural capital” they have. Mentors in their study accepted young people on their own terms. They appeared to value what the young person could bring to the relationship. This is somewhat contradictory to the traditional social capital perspective in which it is what the older adult mentors bring to the relationship that is most valued in order to pass on the social capital they possess to a deprived young person. The study by Philip and Hendry (2000) was undertaken with the informal, or naturally occurring relationships in young people’s lives, which could show marked differences from formalised
programmes. However, the positive results of their study, in terms of the gains for mentors, suggest valuable insights for mentoring practice within formalised mentoring programmes.

2.4.5 Social support perspective

Running through each of the perspectives discussed so far is the element of social support. Attachment theory suggests attachment bonds with adults help to facilitate a positive transition to adulthood for young people (Atwool, 2000), the presence of extra-familial support is one of the features of resilient youth (Rhodes, 1994; Werner and Smith, 1982), and adult guidance and support is a crucial factor in social capital theory (Lee and Crammond, 1999).

That social support is important for emotional well-being is widely recognised in developmental psychology. Social support can vary in form, from material support through to emotional support (Evans and Ave, 2000). Because mentoring is justified as a way of providing support to young people, some researchers have begun considering in more depth the qualities and features of supportive relationships that adolescents consider important (Scales and Gibbons, 1996).

A study from Philip and Hendry (1996) explored how young people perceive mentoring in their lives. Mentors in this research provided informal relationships from which young people sought support. They found that there were a variety of ways adolescents conceptualised mentoring and constructed a typology to describe the range of forms mentoring took for the young people involved in the study. Of particular note in their research is that varying forms of mentoring are significant for different groups of young people. For example, boys were more likely to enter into the “classic” view of a mentoring relationship, that is, a mentor-youth dyad, whereas girls sought support from group settings either in peer groups or in contexts in which there was an adult leader of a group of her friends, in a youth group for example. Girls more often sought support from a “best-friend” who was of a similar age but provided ongoing advice, care and often challenge.

Liang et al. (2002) also suggest that girls require different qualities from a mentoring relationship, specifically, more “relational” qualities. They argue that mentoring for girls in particular will be more effective if the qualities of engagement, authenticity and empowerment are more actively developed in these relationships. Stiles (1991) in Scales and
Gibbons (1996) found that while girls sought help from unrelated adults in the form of listening, encouraging and giving advice, boys more often seemed to seek out adults who had similar interests and could do things with them (Galbo, 1989 in Scales and Gibbons, 1996). This reflects the possibility that support from non-familial adults may differ between genders in similar ways to adolescent friendships.

Cultural considerations are also important as mentoring may take different structural and functional forms in different cultural contexts. Sanchez and Reynes (1999) found that Latina young people were more likely to consider extended family members as their mentors, and most mentors were female. Like the research presented above, Sanchez and Reynes (1999) argue that further research may show that Latina young people value having a number of mentors in their lives, seeking them out for different purposes. In the New Zealand context, where we are multi-cultural with a number of institutions like the whanau and marae for Maori, or the Church for Pacific Islanders, cultural considerations may be particularly relevant although research is needed to determine if this is the case.

A study which focused on teenage mothers as a particular sub-population of young people, suggests that mentoring provides tangible, emotional and instructional support to the young person being mentored (Blinn-Pike et al., 1998). The authors found that the mentors of the teenage mothers provided various forms of social support to the young mums, which the authors termed “quasi-parenting”. This research further illustrates that different sub-groups of young people may require different types of social support.

The findings presented from a range of studies show that young people have different needs and seek adult support for different reasons. As highlighted by Blinn-Pike et al. (1998), more research is needed in order to understand how social support can underpin the nature of mentoring for different sub-populations of young people.

2.4.6 Role modelling – social learning perspective

In the youth mentoring field one of the most popular ways of expressing how the process of a mentoring relationship works has been through role modelling. There is a general consensus in much of the mentoring literature that mentors can promote positive developmental outcomes through the processes of role modelling, providing emotional support, and positive
feedback (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002). Evans and Ave (2000) suggest that role modelling is one of the psychological mechanisms underlying mentoring as a means of social influence.

Role modelling has theoretical roots in social learning theory which has some features that are particularly relevant to the youth mentoring context. Firstly, social learning theory postulates that observational learning is a powerful tool for creating and modifying individuals’ behaviour (Bandura, 1977). Matching young people with mentors who model appropriate and healthy behaviour choices is considered a way of developing pro-social behaviours in young people that will help them in school and later work environments. Secondly, the attention given to models from the learner is mediated through interpersonal attraction. It is likely that models who possess qualities which engage the learner will be more effective (Bandura, 1977). A third tenet from social learning theory that is pertinent to the mentoring literature is that modelling has a strong motivational component (Evans and Ave, 2000) which means behaviour is more likely to be adopted if the learner has a desire to emulate the model (Lee and Crammond, 1999) and the outcomes of behaviour are valued by the learner (Bandura, 1977). These last two points are pertinent because they suggest a theoretical interpretation for the mutual bond that is important within mentoring relationships, particularly if mentoring is to be successful in terms of facilitating a relationship in which the mentor acts as a role model.

These points about role modelling have been reflected in work by Hamilton and Darling (1996). In the context of mentoring they describe the function of role modelling as inclusive of teaching, challenging and supporting the mentee, and suggest the process of role modelling is dependent on the mentee adopting the mentor as a role model. One of the features of acting in a role model capacity emphasised by Kemper (1968) in Hamilton and Darling (1989) is the exemplification of mature, thoughtful ways to think about issues, problem solve and confront issues, although being wary that the purpose is not to teach specific values, but rather to demonstrate one way of being a responsible and competent adult. This view is also backed up by Daloz (1986) in Canister (1999) who suggests that one of the ways to promote growth and learning for mentees is through modelling. However, the purpose is not to become like the mentor, but to become “more fully themselves through the mentor” (Cannister 1999). Daloz emphasises gaining curiosity rather than gaining knowledge.

While the authors discussed above seek to prioritise the process of learning and thinking being facilitated by role modelling, there is also a behavioural component of role modelling that is emphasised in the mentoring literature. For example, the impact study of BBBS
hypothesised that if little buddies were provided with good role models they would be less
likely to engage in risky behaviours and have better ability to cope with peer pressure
(Grossman and Tierney, 1998). Paraprofessionals, people who work alongside clinicians and
professionals, are often used as mentors in treatment programmes with young people, in the
hope that they will provide an alternative experience for children lacking in positive role
models (Jackson, 2002). There is also the potential for mentors to act as “behaviour change
agents” in terms of modifying particularly dysfunctional behaviours (Evans and Ave, 2000).

Particular skills and abilities are able to be passed on through the modelling process, which
may take a more specific teaching role in these instances. The conception of mentors in
creative, academic and business worlds is often related to specific skill development
(Campbell and Campbell, 2000; Gibb, 1999). It can also have a presence in the youth
mentoring field in a variety of ways from sports and academic help through to coping and
problem solving skills (Evans and Ave, 2000).

Some authors use a description of role modelling to explain what a mentor is (Dondero, 1997;
Hamilton and Hamilton, 1992). Other authors suggest that it is a common assumption that the
behaviour of a young person can be influenced by a positive role model, but the nature of this
relationship and its behavioural outcomes has not been thoroughly researched (Beier et al.,
2000). There is also uncertainty about when volunteer role models are superior to other youth
workers in the field, particularly in a cultural context (Bleichman, 1992). Role modelling also
assumes that young people at risk do not have their own access to role models who display
positive ways of operating in society. As well as this, the assumption exists that programmatic
designs can facilitate a relationship in which there is enough mutual attraction and respect for
each other to stimulate the mentee’s desire to be “more like” their mentor (Evans and Ave,
2000). Roberts (2000) considers it is unwise to assume that a mentor who has been assigned a
mentee, as in programmatic designs, will become a role model.

Role modelling has been a popular way of expressing the role of a mentor and the purpose of
a mentoring relationship, although the nature of how this process actually works in the
context of youth mentoring has not been fully explored.
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2.4.7 Critical perspective

There has been some comment from authors that mentoring has been presented from a biased perspective in the literature (Merriam, 1983; Evans and Ave, 2000; Piper and Piper, 2000). Much of the research has concluded that youth mentoring is a positive and effective intervention for young people, even when in many cases only modest results are found (DuBois et al., 2002; Jekielek, Moore, Hair and Scarupa, 2002; Royse, 1998). However there is a growing body of research that considers mentoring from a critical perspective. This perspective begins to move away from the psychologically oriented theoretical interpretations of mentoring that have been described above. The move is to a perspective which is inclusive of the social, economic and political structures in which mentoring operates, while at the same time adding a critique of the psychological paradigm which has dominated the mentoring research and literature.

Homer’s myth is referred to often in the mentoring literature. The concept of mentoring has a history from the story of ‘The Odyssey’ where the character of Mentor was assigned to Telemachus, the King’s son, to be his guide and protector while the King was at war. The classical view of mentoring derives its origins from this story, as Mentor has a close bond with Telemachus and is considered the wise, experienced elder, guiding Telemachus through his developmental journey. The myth is often used as an introduction to the concept of mentoring (Gallimore et al., 1993; Evans, 2000; Evans and Ave, 2000; Freedman, 1993). It provides a quick description of the historical roots of the term and indicates the kind of relationship that is expected to occur in the context of mentoring.

Colley (2000) argues, however, that the myth has been interpreted incorrectly, and seeks to provide a “righting of the rewritings”. She suggests that the account of mentoring in Homer is “the powerful mentoring the powerful” and the outcome is the preservation of a particular social order that has involved political, economic and sexual domination. She goes on to question the relevance of the Greek myth to mentoring in today’s context. She particularly highlights that the Homeric myth of mentoring legitimises a particular version of its practice and in doing so it creates a discourse which becomes the correct way to mentor. Her final conclusion is that the current approaches to mentoring may not be the best use of resources or the most empowering or democratic way of helping young people who are on the fringes of social exclusion. This point is echoed by other critical theorists on the subject (e.g. Piper and Piper, 1999). A number of psychological processes underlying mentoring have been identified by Evans and Ave (2000) including role modelling, providing specific support, modifying
behaviour, and behaving as a parental substitute. However they also suggest that the one-on-one model that has proliferated may not be ‘the best’ or ‘only’ way to incorporate these processes in models of intervention for young people.

There are some authors who have begun to explore in greater depth the role of “power” within mentoring relationships (Colley, 2003; Piper and Piper, 2000; Gay and Stephenson, 1998; Millwater and Yarrow, 1997). Colley (2003) shows that socially constructed gender roles and stereotypic views of “disaffected” young people can be perpetuated within a mentoring dyad. Gay and Stephenson (1998) suggest that externally imposed institutional goals give power to the programme, moving mentoring towards a more controlling and directive process. This is a shift away from the idea of a developmental relationship between one individual and another that is represented by the classic conception of mentoring. Millwater and Yarrow (1997) express power in terms of the expert. Their research showed that mentors have “mindsets”, or ways of thinking, that facilitate their actions within the relationship. In some cases this led to operating the relationship from a position of expert which was dominating rather than teaching, encouraging or supporting the mentee. Piper and Piper (2000) claim that mentoring has the potential to be a covert behaviour modification process which is dominated by the mentor. They also suggest that the context situates young people in a position which implicitly “blames” them for their situation that has led to intervention.

It is important to note that some of these critiques are based on a particular context of mentoring. The rise in mentoring initiatives that receive government funding in the United Kingdom increased dramatically in the late 1990’s, and programmes were specifically related to work transitions. The underpinning assumptions which influenced the practice of mentoring in this context have been particularly critiqued, although there are broader concerns that have also been raised.

The current practice of youth mentoring which is prominent in formalised programmes is most often a one-to-one relationship between a youth and an adult. Adults range in age from university students through to retirees. The focus of programmes varies from friendship (Grossman and Tierney, 1998) through to more specific academic outcomes (McPartland and Nettles, 1991), although in programmes which prioritise friendship there is also the assumption that this will lead to positive behavioural, academic and social improvements. Liang et al. (2002) point out that the view of mentoring as only a mentor-mentee dyadic relationship has assumed that mentors facilitate the transition from adolescence to adulthood by providing information, advice, skill-building, challenge and role modelling. She illustrates
that this assumption tends to construct mentoring as unidirectional and task or behaviour oriented. The mentor takes an interventionist role, and is assumed to have the capabilities to help the mentee with any specific tangible needs or deficiencies (Liang et al., 2002; Lee and Crammond, 1999). Colley (2000a) suggests role modelling is actually a way of perpetuating the discourse of “disaffection” (a label used in the United Kingdom which is more commonly referred to in New Zealand as “at-risk”). She considers that role modelling can be a process by which the young person is “transformed” from “disaffection” to the “ideal”. The “ideal” is embodied in the mentor acting as a role model who has the skills, values, knowledge and attitudes to help the young person be more like them, the “ideal”. The legitimacy of the social ideals into which young people are being mentored is never questioned (Piper and Piper, 2000).

Piper and Piper (2000) and Colley (2000b) suggest the ideal process of mentoring has been for young people to be facilitated into either a work or education role. Mentoring, through the role modelling process, embodies a way of being in society that promotes “fitting in” (Colley, 2000a) to work and education roles. This has been a common theme throughout the theoretical perspectives, particularly in relation to social capital. However, using interventions such as mentoring to “overcome disaffection” is considered essentially problematic because the aim becomes to modify or change an individual to fit the prevailing education or employment needs, positioning the young person from a deficit perspective with a heightened difference in status between the young person and the mentor (Piper and Piper, 2000). In this conception, the economic, social and political structures which contribute to a young person’s situation of “disaffection” are masked as the locus of the problem becomes centred within the person. There are few commentaries which situate mentoring within a broader context because the dominant paradigm has been to locate mentoring on an individual plane.

Colley (2000a) also claims that mentoring relationships which are based on the Homeric style of mentoring fail to consider the “fragmented nature of youth transitions to adulthood and the dislocation of youth identities” (p184). In ignoring the conditions of young people today models of mentoring may result in over-expectations about outcomes and leave volunteer mentors feeling frustrated with their clients and failures in their roles. Colley (2001a) writes with particular reference to women when she refers to “love’s labour lost”. She suggests that mentoring is often constructed as a nurturing activity in which mentees are transformed through the nurturing care of an adult. She continues, suggesting that because 80% of mentors in the United Kingdom are women, gendered perspectives created through a nurturing
framework are reproduced and maintained (Colley, 2001a). Alongside the effects for the women, Colley also suggests that the discourse of “disaffection” continued to marginalise young people who become the “unreformable Other” (p5).

Young people may have priorities, expectations and motivations that are different from the programme goals and aims. The needs of the programme may be quite narrow in some cases, particularly if there is an explicit work or education focus (Piper and Piper, 2000), while young people’s needs may be much broader (Piper and Piper, 1999), especially if they have complex backgrounds and multiple presenting issues. When there are conflicting perspectives it is possible that the goals of the programme become more imperative than that of the mentee. This is a shift away from the practice of developing a mutually satisfying relationship in accordance with the individual’s needs towards a more structured and directed relationship that meets programmatic goals (Gay and Stephenson, 1998). Inherent in this trajectory is the undermining of the notion that mentoring is based on mutual relationship between two people which gradually reduces inequalities in power and status (Piper and Piper, 2000).

As illustrated by the research and theoretical ideas presented in this section, there is a growing literature which critiques the traditional construction of the role of mentors, mentees and the purpose of mentoring. There is, also, a growing literature which calls for mentoring to be situated in broader social, economic and political contexts to reduce the potential for perpetuation of gendered stereotypes, the reproduction of notions of “disaffected” young people, and other power imbalances that can be inherent in programme designs.

2.4.8 Socio-cultural perspective

The critical literature takes issue with the assumptions that are inherent in programme designs when traditional psychological perspectives are used to underpin the importance of mentoring. However it is also important to acknowledge that supportive adults who provide positive influences in young people’s lives are significant for creating a positive transition from adolescence to adulthood, as the resilience and attachment research shows. One of the weaknesses of the current ways mentoring is theorised seems to me to be that at this stage there is very little research which has focused on the processes or dynamics of relationships that encourage positive developmental outcomes for young people who engage in formalised mentoring programmes. In the most extensive mentoring programme in the United States, BBBS, friendship is the mechanism used to encourage the developmental process but little is
known about the characteristics of friendship that produce these outcomes. Although attempts have been made to understand natural supportive relationships for young people, these relationships are qualitatively different to formalised programme designed mentoring relationships.

In response to this, from my own perspective as a person who has studied educational psychology I have tried to integrate what I understand about development alongside the current theorising about mentoring. In doing so I have considered that there is the potential to theorise in more depth the kind of relationship processes that are important to foster developmental outcomes. I also consider that while the critical literature raises important issues there is little suggestion of how to move forward from here, particularly if the practice of one-to-one mentoring continues. A theoretical perspective of development I am familiar with that has had little attention in the mentoring literature but may begin to address some of the current theoretical and practical limitations is socio-cultural theory. This is a theory which focuses on understanding development as a result of participation in social relationships.

Underpinning most of the theoretical perspective presented so far is the notion of transmitting to the young person, either through friendship or more specific means, the knowledge, values, skills and attitudes necessary for success at school, in work situations and in relationships with peers, teachers and family. Much of the youth mentoring literature has used the information from these theories to assume that providing the young person with a mentor will facilitate this process of ‘transmission’, although the actual processes by which it happens are unclear.

In contrast, socio-cultural theory suggests that developmental growth occurs through the process of co-constructing knowledge within the context of social interaction. The notion of co-construction is a subtle, but very important, difference that is distinct from the process of ‘transmission’. This basic underpinning assumption of socio-cultural theory necessarily shifts the focus away from the incapacities or deficiencies of the young person to consider the ways that social relationships and interactions can improve the competencies of the young person. This shift happens because to engage at a level where each participant can be involved in constructing knowledge requires beginning at an entry point that is within each individual’s capabilities.

In my view, the orientation that socio-cultural thought brings to understanding relationships in a developmental context has implications for any setting in which the development of people
is considered important. Youth mentoring is just such a setting, although at the current time socio-cultural ways of thinking have had scant attention in the youth mentoring literature. For this reason I think it is useful to include in this section the basic ideas of socio-cultural theory which could be applicable in a youth mentoring setting.

Socio-cultural theory originates with Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist who worked during the first and second quarters of the 20th century. Since Vygotsky’s original writings there have been many developments to his work. I will be drawing on the original principles of development that Vygotsky proposed as well as more contemporary understandings of his work with particular reference to activity theory.

One of the critical aspects of Vygotsky’s original ideas is the primary importance of social relationships in the advancement of thinking, learning and consequently development (Hamilton and Darling, 1996). Since Vygotsky, other researchers have suggested that the development of higher psychological functioning includes self-esteem and self regulation (Gallimore et al., 1993) which are often the focus of youth mentoring programmes. Kerr (2000) suggests Vygotsky offers a perspective about the nature of psychological change which includes social, emotional, behavioural and cognitive developments. Vygotsky characterised the relationship between social interactions and psychological change as:

“... every function in the child’s development appears twice: first on the social level, and later, on the individual level, first between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological) ... Social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships.” (quoted in Wertsch, 1985)

From this perspective, the mentoring relationship can be viewed as an activity setting in which the kind of social interaction that occurs between the participants has the potential to influence the development of self-esteem, self-regulation and other higher psychological functions of the young person.

Language was viewed by Vygotsky as a primary psychological ‘tool’ with which activity between people was mediated. According to Vygotsky, a psychological tool is a means for psychologically influencing behaviour – either the behaviour of another or one’s own behaviour, it is a means of internal ‘activity’ (Vygotsky, 1978). He saw language as a critical component of the interactive process of internalisation and development.
The concept of ‘activity’ is integral to understanding the usefulness of this theoretical perspective to youth mentoring. Activity refers to thinking, doing and being in this context (Kerr, 2000). Vygotsky suggested that in the process of shared ‘activity’ that which is firstly external becomes internalised. Vygotsky considered that it was in the “sense” of activity that development could occur. The sense refers to the untouchable, intangible meanings that are made during the interaction process.

To illustrate this concept I would like to use the example of ‘baking a cake’, which is something that may occur between mentors and mentees in a mentoring relationship. With this example I want to explain how the concept of joint participation in ‘activity’ has more depth than simply the activity at hand. For example, in the activity of ‘baking a cake’ between a more experienced person (say a mentor) and a less experienced person (say a mentee) there are a multitude of opportunities for the mentor and mentee together to construct understandings of the mentee’s self (and possibly the mentor’s). In the activity of baking a cake many things occur; participation in decisions, responsibility for certain parts of the process, the way one is instructed, and how much instruction is given compared to collaborative discussion. These are examples of the kinds of interactions that occur between the pair making the cake. At the same time, the ‘sense’ or social meanings of these activities is being internalised. For example the interactions above could contribute to a positive sense of self as a competent measurer of sugar and flour, a person who is able to contribute to decisions about what cake to make and how to make it, and a person who can work alongside another in a shared task. On a broader level Vygotsky would also argue that cultural meanings and values are transmitted in this process. For example, the kind of role that young people have in participation, or gender roles may be in the process of being defined. The way in which the interactions progressed contributes to the kind of understanding about the self that is internalised. Thus the ‘activity’ that is external in the language (a psychological ‘tool’) and action of cake baking becomes internal.

A second concept of Vygotskian thought that connects learning and development to activity is the notion of a ‘zone of proximal development’. Vygotsky saw this as the mechanism for learning (Palinscar, 1998). He defined the zone of proximal development as “…the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p86). Gallimore et al. (1993) consider this concept to have profound implications for mentoring relationships. They
consider that for developmental gains to be achieved “a zone of proximal development must be opened, and in joint participation the mentee must be assisted to do what she/he cannot do without the assistance of the mentor” (p15).

Here we return to the concept of activity. Gallimore et al. (1993) suggest the most common context of assisted performance is face-to-face social interaction of individuals engaged in joint activity. There are some key features of activity settings in this context that make it more likely a ‘zone of proximal development’ will be entered. Firstly, joint participation is critical. In joint activities input from both people involved is required which allows a sharing of perspectives and emerging shared understandings about the purposes and meaning of the activity (Gallimore et al., 1993). Secondly, the objectives of the participants may be different (http://lche.ucsd.edu/People/Localz/MCole/browncole.html, 27/07/03; Gallimore et al., 1993). It is important however that activity settings do have some kind of goal that is motivating for both the mentor and mentee, whether or not the ultimate goal of the mentor is shared by the mentee. For example, in the cake baking scenario ultimately the mentor may be hoping to foster self-belief in the mentee that he/she is capable of participating in new activities but it is not essential that the mentee shares that goal. Hamilton and Darling (1996) also refer to this concept. Thirdly, it is not necessary that the mentor be an ‘expert’ in the activity. It is important that the mentor does not extend authority over activity settings beyond the initial organisation of them. In as much as is possible the authority of the activity setting needs to be shared with the mentee to enable the influence of the mentee’s competencies (Gallimore et al., 1993). The activity setting is the common social process between the participants in which social meanings and cognitive structures develop, there is the opportunity to enter a ‘zone of proximal development’ and there is the potential for a young person’s competencies to be enabled.

These features of activity settings increase the likelihood of a third important concept of socio-cultural thought; intersubjectivity. To the degree that intersubjectivity is present between people then cooperative interaction is possible. Gallimore et al. (1993) suggest that it is the intersubjective dimension of joint activity that acts as a reward to its participants. It is this aspect of the process of engaging together that makes activities memorable, worthwhile and gratifying to those who are involved and it motivates participants to continue to be involved. Intersubjectivity arises through the processes discussed above; joint activity in which shared meanings, concepts, motivations, beliefs and expectations are acquired.
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Finally I want to highlight the contextual nature of socio-cultural thought. The activity settings referred to above do not occur in a vacuum. The cultural-historical context influences the activities and interactions that occur between people and within institutions. Often there are layers of context which contribute to the emergence of activities, and likewise activities influence the surrounding context. One way the influence of context can be conceptualised is through Bronfenbrenner’s theoretical model of concentric circles, with the inner most circle being the focal activities which are constituted by and constitute the circles surrounding it (http://lchc.ucsd.edu/People/Localz/MCole/browncole.html, 27/07/03). Another way of conceptualising context is through a ‘context-as-weaving’ metaphor which symbolises that individuals, institutions, ideologies and artefacts interact in a way that leads to the emergence of particular activities (http://lchc.ucsd.edu/People/Localz/MCole/browncole.html, 27/07/03).

2.5 Relationship dynamics in mentoring

The previous section detailed the main theories that have been used to inform mentoring. These theories have contributed to the way we understand mentoring. In many ways this has been useful for identifying young people who may benefit from developing a relationship with someone outside of their family. However, as already indicated, what these theories tell us less about is the actual dynamics of relationships that are important if they are to result in the kind of positive developmental benefits that are assumed to occur. Most of the theories discussed have arisen from an understanding of natural adult supportive relationships in young people’s lives (e.g. Werner and Smith, 1982). Whether a formal programme can effectively emulate the same features that occur in natural relationships is a question that has been raised in the literature (Rhodes, 1994).

While there are benefits to the way mentoring has been theorised, the critical literature has also indicated some limitations. This is particularly with regard to the assumptions that underpin the use of these theories. In general the main criticism is that the theoretical perspectives position the young person and occasionally their families with a deficit orientation. This is considered problematic because it increases the tendency to view the problem as located within the individual (Piper and Piper, 1999), disregarding the wider context young people are part of, for example the nature of schooling, economic circumstances, or living situation. For these reasons critical theorists warn that mentoring,
without critical reflection, can be part of perpetuating an understanding of these young people as deficient rather than encouraging developmental growth.

Another way that our understanding about mentoring is informed is through outcome and evaluation studies. In the literature there are a large number of outcome studies as most research has focused on trying to ‘prove’ the legitimacy of mentoring as an intervention. This has often stemmed from the need to secure funding for mentoring programmes which requires that they provide results (Freedman, 1993). However, outcome studies do not give a clear indication about the relative merits of youth mentoring in programme settings. In a comprehensive meta-analysis across 55 evaluations of the effects of mentoring programmes, DuBois et al., (2002) found that there was evidence of only modest benefits of programme participation for most youth involved. DuBois et al., (2002) also concluded that the most significant effects were found when mentoring programmes were effectively implemented relying on theory based and empirically based “best practices” as well as when there was a strong relationship formed between the mentor and the mentee.

One programme which does have research evaluations that show its success at facilitating positive outcomes for mentees is the BBBS of America programme. In the evaluation mentees were shown to benefit in a number of ways including: decreased antisocial behaviours, improved school attendance, increased perceived scholastic competence, and improved relationship with parents (Grossman and Tierney, 1998). The authors emphasised that the results are specific to the way the BBBS programme operates and may not generalise across programmes which are operated differently. There are two significant features of the programme that the authors highlight. One, the programme is aimed at mentors becoming friends with the young person and not at correcting specific problems. Two, there are clear processes that provide support to the mentee as well as the mentor in the form of on-going supervision and training. This is one of the significant “best practices” that was highlighted by DuBois et al., (2002).

This evaluation suggests that friendship alongside strong support from the programme impacts on young mentees positively. What we know less about from the evaluation is how friendship impacts on these outcomes. There have been two studies which have focused specifically on BBBS relationships. These have revealed valuable information about the characteristics of relationships that lead to reports of greater satisfaction from mentors and mentees, as well as mentees feeling supported. These characteristics included: being child-centred, focusing on the relationship rather than behaviour, prioritising fun, understanding
initial lack of self-disclosure and encouraging shared decision making with their mentee (Morrow and Styles, 1995). This study offers insights into relationship dynamics that encourage a strong relationship, the other significant factor identified in successful mentoring programmes (DuBois et al., 2002). One of the final conclusions from DuBois et al., (2002) is that understanding more about the characteristics that encourage effective mentoring relationships is an area that is lacking a strong research base at this stage. Colley (2001b) also suggests that the mentoring research has predominantly been outcome-focused with little attention paid to exploring the processes that occur between the before and after indicators.

Understanding more about the nature of the relationship and the dynamics that occur between mentors and mentees is another way that our conceptions of mentoring can be constructed. This forms the central focus of my present study. I have chosen to incorporate my understanding of socio-cultural theory into this work because the nature of the relationship between mentors and mentees is my main area of interest. While I acknowledge that outcome studies and the theoretical perspectives used to inform mentoring have made valuable contributions to of the youth mentoring jigsaw, I think there are limitations to being able to understand in depth the dynamics of formalised relationships by these means.

In my view understanding more about relationship processes within formalised mentoring relationships is an important area of investigation. Lucas (2001) also suggests that there is the need for a “new literature for participants in planned mentoring programs” (p26) that encapsulates the complexity and challenges of forming relationships with young people. The BBBS studies offer some first insights into the kind of relationship dynamics that may be important. There are two other studies which have also focused on the kind of processes that occur in mentoring relationships. Liang et al., (2001) found that for late adolescent women the presence of relational qualities of mentoring, for example empathy, engagement and empowerment, led to feelings of higher self esteem for the young women. Blinn-Pike et al., (1998) found that the processes of mentoring relationship with young pregnant women were much like quasi-parental roles and suggested that the needness of the adolescents determined the extent to which mentors assumed this role. These studies illustrate that different dynamics are potentially important for different types of young people with different needs. This concept is supported by Lucas (2001) who suggests that the construction of roles for mentors and mentees is related to the context of the programme, and is a dynamic process which is continually being defined by the participants.
In another study, Colley (2000b) found that the kind of assumptions that underpin the theoretical perspectives of mentoring can lead to an inherent deficit orientation towards mentees within mentoring programme designs. She also found that mentors can bring their own assumptions which are often of a deficit orientation to the programme. She found these implicit assumptions impact significantly on the satisfaction of the mentors and mentees as well as the outcomes of the programme. The need for a critical thinking approach to mentoring is corroborated by Millwater and Yarrow (1997) who consider that the “mindset”, or the attitudes, values and beliefs which mentors have, facilitates the role and interactions that occur within the relationship. The extent to which there is a deficit orientation towards mentees impacts on the power dynamics of the relationship. They suggest this is a move away from an empowering relationship that meets the mentees needs to one in which the aims of the mentor become most important.

2.6 The present study

In this study the focus has also been to understand in more depth the experiences of mentors and mentees with the intention of gaining insight into the complex nature of mentoring relationships that exist within formalised settings. The nature of my interest has meant I have focused on four mentor-mentee pairs to gain an in-depth perspective of their experiences. In undertaking this study I intend to use critical perspectives and socio-cultural theory as a framework for understanding the data I have collected.

Critical perspectives have alerted me to the implicit assumptions that exist within programme settings and the influence this can have on subsequent experiences. I have also become aware of the need to clarify the personal histories that mentors bring with them to the mentoring relationship as this can also impact significantly on the way the relationship is made sense of. This understanding has shaped the way I interpreted the stories of the participants in this study.

The apparent limitations of the current theoretical perspectives that inform mentoring have influenced my interest in socio-cultural theory as a different way of theorising youth mentoring. The existing literature suggests that there is a need to understand the processes of relationships which influence positive outcomes for mentees. I think socio-cultural theory could be a particularly useful theory to address the current gap in understanding because it is
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cconcerned with the dynamics of relationships that encourage developmental growth. However, I need to caution that I intend to avoid the temptation of seeking data that will ‘fit’ with a socio-cultural interpretation. There has been the tendency for developmental theories to be grafted onto the way we understand youth mentoring which may not adequately reflect the complexities of these particular relationships (Rhodes, 1994; Philip, 1999). This study aims to understand more about what it is like being in a mentoring relationship from the participants’ perspectives, and using this information to guide further thinking. The data collected may or may not be reflective of socio-cultural theory or any of the theoretical perspectives discussed.

A socio-cultural approach has also informed my intent to understand the perspective of the mentee. This is a ‘voice’ that has had little attention so far in the youth mentoring research. I think it is important that the perspective of the mentee is understood because they are a critical part of the relationship and it is with them that the experiences of the mentors are constructed. Consequently so too is our knowledge and understanding of the concept of mentoring. For this reason it seems particularly important that the way mentees make sense of the relationship is considered.

I have developed a thesis which explores the experiences of four pairs of mentors and mentees who were part of a mentoring programme aimed at reducing truancy. The intent is to gain insight into the complexity of mentoring relationships within this particular setting. I am interested in understanding more about the way the relationship is made sense of by the participants and the kind of meanings that are constructed through the process of being engaged in the experience. I will be using in-depth interviews to come to understand more about the way mentors and mentees think and feel about their experience, what impacted them in this experience, what their personal histories were that brought them to this experience, and the dynamics that occurred between them during the experience. I think that exploring these concepts can better inform us as to the kind of challenges and opportunities that exist for creating mentoring relationships that are effective within programme settings.
Chapter 3  METHODOLOGY

This chapter has been divided into thee parts; theoretical orientation, data collection and data analysis. The chapter sets out ‘what I did’ to obtain the data, why I did it this way and how I analysed the data.

3.1  Theoretical orientation

Guiding me in this work has been my orientation towards constructionism as an epistemological way of understanding the way we come to make sense of the world. Constructionism is the view that meaningful reality is constructed through interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within a social context (Crotty, 1998). Also in this work I have been guided by the notion of constructivism which is the perspective that the way each individual makes sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other (Crotty, 1998).

These perspectives have been influential in the development of my area of enquiry which is to understand the way mentoring is made sense of for mentors and mentees who are engaged in mentoring relationships. The meanings they make have developed from their own personal histories as well as what is constructed between them as a result of participating in their experience. I am interested in understanding the realities of each participant and the way they experienced and understood the relationship.
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A constructivist approach means I make the assumption that multiple realities exist and so the collection and subsequent analysis of the data reflects the mutual constructions I as a researcher also created with the assistance of the participants (Charmaz, 2000).

The title I have given this work represents the dual process of meaning making in this project. One, that the participants have made sense of the experience from their involvement and two, that meanings have been constructed through my interaction with the participants experiences. As such this work is an interpreted, rather than an exact, picture of the experiences I was interested in.

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Research participants

The participants of the study were accessed through a program run by the District Truancy Service (DTS). The DTS I worked with is one of a number of similar organisations nationwide that are funded by the Ministry of Education and individual schools. Each truancy service has its own way of operating with the general aim of reducing truancy in their respective regions. Because there is relative autonomy among the various organisations, the service I worked with decided to implement a mentoring program as a way to reduce the incidence of truancy for young people on the fringes of more serious truant behaviour. I chose to use the DTS in this research because I was interested in learning more about mentoring relationships in a context with a link to education.

As a means of understanding the context and culture of the organisation, I conducted a number of interviews with the staff of the truancy service at the time of this study. However, because I was unable to pursue my original research design ideas\(^1\) this project eventually

\(^1\) I intended with the original research design to work with two mentor-mentee pairs who were beginning their relationship, two who had been meeting for some months and two who had finished the relationship. In this way I was hoping to access the ‘lived experience’ across the life span of a mentoring relationship as it happened. My interest in doing prospective work was stimulated by the literature which highlights the contribution prospective work could add to understanding the processes involved in developing and engaging in a mentoring relationship (Rhodes, 1994; Blinn-Pike et al., 1998). Part of the original research design included a variant of the experiential sampling method explained in Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1984) and the use of diaries for those who were just beginning or still engaged in a mentoring relationship. This was in order to access ‘the thoughts, feelings and motives of the participants as they were involved in the experience. However although I was assured mentor-mentee matches would be made in the year I undertook this study, this did not eventuate and only one pair was still meeting regularly but had a very tenuous link with the DTS. This meant the original design could not be implemented.
revolved around mentor-mentee pairs who had been involved with the programme prior to the current staff. Because of this the interviews with the current staff became background information.

I assumed that the ‘lived experience’ of the mentor and mentee pairs in this study will have been influenced by the particular context of this DTS at the time they were involved. Because of this I also conducted interviews with two people who had been involved with the DTS when the participants interviewed had been part of the program. These were the out-going mentoring manager, who had been involved for two years, and the supervisor who, in the past, provided supervision for the mentors on a monthly basis. These interviews were conducted with the aim of understanding more about the culture and context of the mentoring program that was in operation when the participants of this study were part of it. The interview with the out-going mentoring manager became an important one for this study.

One interview that was missing from the people involved in the past was that of a previous truancy officer who was involved during the time that the mentor-mentee pairs in this study were put together. Unfortunately this person was unable to be contacted and it has left somewhat of a gap in understanding the role of the truancy officer, as conceptualised by him. This is particularly relevant because the mentees involved in this study mentioned him on occasion and they had more contact with the truancy officer than the mentors did. It would have been beneficial to have understood his perspective to contextualise the mentees experiences further.

Four mentor-mentee pairs were interviewed for this study. I chose to use mentors and mentees who were part of a pair because this study is focused on understanding more about the ‘lived experience’ of mentors and mentees who engage in a mentoring relationship. For this reason it is important to portray both perspectives of the mentoring relationship. I did undertake preliminary interviews with three other mentors. However the data collected from these interviews was not used in the study because their mentees were untraceable. The pairs were accessed from records of mentor-mentee matches that had been made in the past two years. I was given access to these documents with the permission of the current mentoring manager. One of the pairs was accessed through a referral made by another mentor who was interviewed.

Three of the four mentors whose interviews have been used in the study were recruited from either medical school or teachers college. These institutions, along with the university, were
the primary places from which the outgoing mentoring manager recruited mentors. The fourth mentor became involved through a prior connection she had with the truancy service. Three of the four were of a similar age (early to mid twenties) and the fourth was in his late twenties. All of the mentors came from middle class backgrounds and had attended tertiary education institutions. One mentor did, however, have a learning disability and left school when she was 15, before attending polytech at a later time.

Of the mentees whose interviews were used in the study, there were three boys and one girl. Two of the boys began their mentoring relationships at age 10, another at 12 while the girl began at age 14. Each of these young people had varying home backgrounds and school histories. All were from different areas of the city. Further information about the mentors and mentees is given in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

In addition to the interviews, I also spent some unstructured time with one mentor-mentee pair who were still meeting regularly, by taking part in one of the mentoring sessions they had together. The intention in being part of this afternoon was for me to get to know the mentee, Caleb, a little better before I interviewed him. Caleb was the only mentee I took this approach with. This was because on my initial meeting with Caleb he was less forthcoming or enthusiastic about being part of the study than the other mentees. However because of my position as a researcher, I could not help being an observer of the interactions, activities and conversations that occurred between the mentor and mentee. The observations and subsequent notes formed part of the data for this particular pair and enriched the interpretation of their relationship.

The following table summarises the mentor and mentee participants of this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor</th>
<th>Mentee</th>
<th>Age of Mentee at beginning of program</th>
<th>Time mentored</th>
<th>Observation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1 year. Finished</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>Glen</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2 years. Ongoing very irregularly</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>Caleb</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15 months. Ongoing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krista</td>
<td>Dylan</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1½ years. Finished</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I also conducted an interview with one other young person who was in the process of being matched with a potential mentor. Unfortunately circumstances meant this relationship did not eventuate. I have not used information from this interview towards understanding the ‘lived
experiences’ of mentees because the relationship did not extend beyond an initial meeting between the mentee and her mentor, and therefore did not meet my objective of understanding the relationship between them. However I was aware at the time of the interview, and continue to be aware, that the process of establishing and, subsequently, disestablishing of a potential mentoring relationship for this young mentee left me, as the researcher, feeling uncomfortable. The circumstances of this potential relationship highlighted that mentoring does not always go to plan. Listening to and understanding the voices of young people who are impacted by these kinds of situations is another valuable area for research to consider, but was beyond the scope of this particular project. Despite these circumstances the interview was useful in terms of highlighting the functioning of the DTS mentoring program in the year the study was conducted.

I also interviewed two caregivers of the mentees. My initial reasons for these interviews were to increase the sense of comfort the caregivers had about their children participating in the study. I sensed on a first meeting that interviewing them was a way to ensure I would be able to interview the young people in their care. It transpired that in these interviews I gained valuable contextual information about the home life and backgrounds of the two mentees concerned. In this way these interviews came to augment and add value to understanding the experiences of mentors and mentees.

In summary, I conducted a number of interviews for this project from a variety of perspectives. The main focus of the research was to work towards an understanding of the mentoring relationship from the perspective of the participants which meant four mentor-mentee pairs were interviewed in depth. However there were a number of interviews conducted outside the direct mentor-mentee relationship which have helped enhance the context in which mentors and mentees ‘lived’ their experience.

Interviews generally lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and a half. Each of the interviewees involved received an information sheet (refer Appendices A and B) and needed to sign a consent form (refer Appendices C and D). For interviewees who were aged 12 or younger I also received signed consent from caregivers for their involvement in the study (refer Appendix E). Participants were able to withdraw from the project at any time along with any information they supplied. Pseudonyms have been supplied to all participants to protect confidentiality. The project received approval from the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Canterbury.
3.2.2 In-depth interviewing

The area of investigation I was interested in, the kind of data I wanted to collect and the circumstances of the program led me to use in-depth interviewing as the method of choice for this project.

In-depth interviewing is referred to as ‘guided conversation’ (Warren, 2001) and is a technique which is designed to draw out the meanings for individuals (or groups) of their lived experience. The in-depth interviewer views participants as active meaning makers rather than passive vessels of answers (Warren, 2001). Therefore the attitude with which the researcher enters the conversation is one of curiosity and interest in understanding the perspective of the individual. It assumes that preconceived questionnaire type interviews drawn from the interviewer’s own understanding (often informed by the literature) will not capture the extent of the experience required. In-depth interviewing recognises and acknowledges that the participant is an expert and has a perspective on their experience that can provide valuable insights which enrich our understanding of the area of interest. To this end it is important that the researcher comes to the interview with an open perspective. In guiding the conversation the researcher needs to remain flexible to the variety of meanings that may emerge through the interview process, insights which in some cases, may render the original interview topics irrelevant (Warren, 2001).

3.2.3 My approach to interviewing

Qualitative methodology in a broad sense refers to research that produces descriptive data, that is, data based on people’s own written or spoken words and observable behaviour. Using qualitative methodology is not just a set of techniques but a way of interacting with the world. There are key ways of ‘doing’ qualitative research that have been highlighted in Taylor and Bogdan (1998). These principles, along with information from other texts, guided both the choice and implementation of the methodology in this study. In the following section I have highlighted these principles and reflected on how I used them in my approach to this research.

Subjectivity

To be aware of my own presuppositions, assumptions and taken-for-granted views about mentoring, I noted down my thoughts about mentoring at the outset of the project. These
included: my expectations about the kinds of people who were mentors and mentees and what their characteristics might be, the kind of information I expected to gain from the participants, my assumptions about how mentoring relationships worked, and what I thought could be gained for both the mentor and the mentee from engaging in a mentoring relationship. This process was invaluable as a way to make explicit in my awareness the expectations and assumptions I held. It also served as a way to better ensure that these had less influence during the data collection phase. It enabled me to let the stories of the participants unfold with the relative importance the participants attached to various points of interest driving my understanding rather than my own expectations and assumptions.

In this research the stories I have told have also been influenced by who I am. I more closely identify with the mentors of the study. They were all about my age, from similar backgrounds to my own and had similar academic histories. Because of this I found I was able to more easily understand and relate to their reflections. This was particularly noticeable with regard to whose voice is most predominant in my retelling of their stories. Less of the story of the relationship is from the mentees’ perspective. On reflection I realised that my subjective identification with the mentors meant I tended towards unintentionally privileging them as a data source during the collection phase, which had implications for being able to retell the stories in a balanced way in the analysis. This is a limitation of the study which future researchers could be more mindful of.

**Collection and content of the data.**

Interview questions were continually being developed as I moved through the project and responded to the various interviews I was undertaking. Each interview enhanced my understanding of the context and the topic, which in turn helped determine the questions that were important and those that were not. As well as the interviews generating ideas I wrote reflections on my interactions with the participants during interviews and thoughts that arose during the process of an interview. These were also valuable for informing subsequent interviews and for analysis of the data as the research took place.

There were three ‘sets’ of interviews which also influenced how I ‘did’ the project. Firstly, three initial interviews I undertook with mentors, whose data have not been used in the final project, were beneficial because they provided a preliminary understanding which enriched the way I thought about the topic and enabled me to develop a clearer focus for later
interviews with the mentors and mentees whose data is used in the project. Secondly, as the interviews progressed with the mentors and mentees I was further informed about topics that were particularly salient, and others that were not and these were reflected in the later interviews. Finally, as the interviews with people from the DTS unfolded, these also added depth to understandings about the experience of mentoring in this particular context, and questions emerged that were informed from this perspective.

The preliminary interviews with the three mentors were beneficial for trying out ways of undertaking the interview in terms of time, place and use of the tape recorder. This process of redefinition continued in the subsequent interviews with the participants of this study. It meant that in two cases I did two interviews with mentors. The first interview was an initial ‘getting to know you’ session that tackled general background issues and was not recorded. The second interview was based more specifically on the mentoring relationship and was audio-tape recorded. However, the experience of these two interviews also led me to change practice for the final two, as the first interview was eliciting valuable and relevant knowledge that I wanted to transcribe, and two meetings appeared unnecessary.

Throughout the data collection phase, the focus was not on collecting data to fit with one or any of the existing multiple perspectives of mentoring that have been outlined in the preceding literature review. The intention was to develop deeper understanding and insight from the perspective of the people engaged in the mentoring process, which may or may not fit within current frameworks for viewing mentoring.

**Interviewing in a natural context**

I endeavoured to meet this objective by creating interview contexts that replicated natural situations as much as possible. One of the strategies to do this was interviewing participants in settings they chose to be interviewed in. In most cases for the mentors this was at home, and for the people involved with the DTS this was at work during their working day. Interviews with the mentees took place in different contexts which are described below. I also interviewed two of the mentees' caregivers whose interviews took place at home. One of the preliminary interviewees had two interviews, one at a café without the use of a tape recorder, and another at the university, when the tape recorder was used. Interestingly, my reflections note that the interview at the café had a more conversational feel than the one at university, which could indicate that the more formal setting, with a tape recorder, encouraged an
expectation of a more formal interview process. I therefore decided to use the university as a last option and no other interviews with mentors took place there. I found that the tape recorder proved less of a conversation barrier when interviews were conducted in a home setting where seating arrangements were less formal, and the tape recorder could become less conspicuous in the space of the room. Times that the interviews occurred were arranged to suit the interviewee in all cases.

The structure of the interview was also aimed at creating natural contexts in as much as it was possible. I attempted to enter into conversations with each of the participants rather than formal question-response dialogues. I took with me to the interview some ideas of topics I could ask questions about (refer to Appendix H and I). Taylor and Bogdan (1998) refer to this as an interview guide. The guide proved useful in stimulating conversation. However I also took a flexible, open perspective. This enabled the interviewee to direct the interview as much as they were inclined to ensure the important and relevant information for them was heard. However, the positions of ‘interviewer’ and ‘interviewee’ were not eliminated, as is to be expected with one-off interviews. This did influence my role as the person who continued the conversation at transitional points in the interview. The interview guide I developed was useful in these situations. The guide also reflected a critical and analytic approach to the conversation which was an important way of keeping the conversation focused on the research objectives (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). The guide was based on both my research focus and the preliminary interviews. However on-going interviews continued to shape it towards the issues that were proving salient. This meant that the last interviews were different in some respects to the first. Although I tried to create a context in which a ‘natural’ conversation could occur for the participants, it was also important that as the researcher I maintained a critical and analytic perspective during the conversation because interviews were the main methodology

Interviewing in a natural context was a particularly important approach to working with the mentees in this study. Eder and Fingerson (2001) highlight that in general children have lower status than adults in Western societies and researchers need to be sensitive to this power imbalance. There are a number of ways to lessen the effect of power dynamics in interviews with young people that Eder and Fingerson (2001) suggest; interviewing in a natural context is one of their recommendations.

In this research project all the interview settings were of the mentees choice so that I could avoid the interview situation becoming reminiscent of classroom lessons based on “known-
answer” questions. I wanted to encourage the young person to share what they actually think or feel, rather than seeking to provide answers that they though I was expecting. In the interviews I undertook I was careful to encourage activities the young people chose which removed us from a classroom-like setting. I was also flexible with enabling the young person to play with the recording equipment if they wanted to, and during the interviews I encouraged the young people to do activities that suited them. In the interviews I undertook this included: time for playing on a skate board, eating a meal at KFC, watching T.V and walking up a hill. By engaging in activities chosen by the young person I was able to facilitate an interview context in which play and experiences they chose were important, which I believe empowered them in the interview setting.

Eder and Fingerson (2001) also suggest that a brief period of observation is helpful so that natural contexts can be identified and the young person’s own speech patterns can be identified for use in the interview. In four of the five interview cases I met the young person prior to the interview in an informal setting introducing myself and the project, usually with a care-giver present. In one of these cases I spent an afternoon with one boy and his mentor before interviewing him with the intention of building some familiarity and rapport between us. The final case was with an older girl who I had a phone conversation with before interviewing her when she decided it was not necessary for me to meet her prior to the interview. The meetings prior to the interview were helpful to give me a chance as the researcher to pass on to the young people how important they were to the project because they were in a position of holding the knowledge I wanted to learn about. In this way I was able to reverse roles so I became the learner and they the teacher, which was also beneficial for reducing power inequalities (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992).

Another recommendation from Eder and Fingerson (2001) is that group interviews are particularly important for children and young people because it provides them with a space to construct meanings through a shared process, which is the most natural way for them to communicate social knowledge to others. Peer culture becomes increasingly important in early adolescence which could also be valued in a group setting. In the current study I did not undertake any focus group interviews because logistically it would have been difficult for me to arrange for a number of reasons. I also made the assumption after my initial interview with them that of the particular young people I interviewed one or two may have responded well in a focus group setting, although the others were more likely to engage in individual interviews. Another consideration to this decision was that none of the mentees knew each other which I
also felt would reduce the naturalness of the interview context rather than enhance it. However, I am aware that not including focus group interviews is a potential limitation of the study. I did find it difficult to engage the mentees in as much depth as the mentors and it is possible that focus group interviews could be one way of overcoming this difficulty.

**Accuracy and validity**

Checking for validity and accuracy of the data is an important part of qualitative work to ensure that recording and interpretations fit with the respondents’ experiences. To ensure accuracy in this work I used mentor-mentee participants who were paired together so I could represent a picture of individual experiences that had both perspectives. I also chose to interview people who provided rich contextual information that enhanced the data from the mentors and mentees. Finally, I gave all the respondents the opportunity to read through their verbatim transcripts. None, however, chose to view them after the interview had taken place.

### 3.3 Data analysis

The following section explains the methods used to analyse the data. One of the basic techniques used in qualitative analysis is to identify key categories or themes that emerge from the data, in relation to the research questions, and code the data according to these using the ‘cut and paste’ feature of word processing (or a computer program such as NUD*IST that works by the same process in more sophistication). This process enables more abstract concepts to be elaborated and interconnections made between categories.

I began using this method and quickly came to realise that the particular way I was doing it produced tensions for me as the researcher because the data appeared to become decontextualised. For example, the interview with Zara taken as a whole reveals her tendency to avoid authoritarian figures and remain in control of her circumstances. When coding Zara’s interview these patterns did not arise because statements from her that revealed these tendencies were linked to other categories. It was not until her interview was taken as a whole that these subtle patterns became more obvious. In an attempt to mitigate the tensions I felt I modified my approach to coding, reconceptualised the overall frame of the analysis to a case study approach and included some narrative analysis. These multiple methods of analysis enabled me to retain more fully the meaningfulness of the participants’ stories.
During the process of data collection I was constantly returning to the data and going over the transcripts. I used mindmaps and bullet points on large pieces of paper to begin to draw out emerging similarities between the data as well as the uniqueness that each story presented. These mindmaps drew out key words or phrases that became the foundation of possible categories which would become the basis of further coding analysis. I created a ‘parent file’ on the computer which was a file containing all the interviews with the mentor-mentee pairs and the two interviews with caregivers. Using the key words and phrases developed from the mindmaps I undertook various searches of the parent file (using the Microsoft Word tool ‘Find’) to draw out relevant quotes from the pages of data.

It proved to be an effective process in that I was able to tease out a number of quotes that related directly to aspects of the mentoring experience and fitted with my original research question which was a search for the meaningfulness of the relationship. However, at the same time a number of tensions were emerging for me about the way the data was beginning to look at this point. The tensions I encountered were similar to Colley (2001b). Her experience arose from a similar project (although on a bigger scale) with a similar research focus – understanding the meanings mentors and mentees brought to and developed through the experience. I found I shared some of the difficulties she had with the typical use of coding as an analysis tool. She also used narrative analysis to help her reconnect with the data and developed a new way of using narrative. Her experiences led her to the conclusion that there is no method of certainty when analysing qualitative data. She suggests that to make sense of the data methods must be applied with thought and consideration for the integrity of the research to ensure the choice of method does not drive the analysis off course. The tensions I experienced are outlined below and following that the measures I took to overcome them.

Firstly, I began to realise that I was unintentionally relating to the data within a particular theoretical frame, namely socio-cultural theory. Because of this I felt that the key words and phrases were in some ways particularly relevant to the mentoring relationship from this perspective but may not have captured the experiences from the point of view of the participants. It was as if the data was beginning to be ‘constructed’ to fit with a socio-cultural way of interpreting the meaningfulness of the experience. This way of analysing meant I was operating from particular assumptions about how mentoring relationships should look according to this theory, however, at this time I needed to be categorising and coding without privileging a particular theoretical perspective.
Methodology

Secondly, I found with using the coding technique the data form the mentors was privileged just because there was so much more of it. The mentors were better at articulating their thoughts, feelings and descriptions about the experience which led to much more data to work with from them. Whereas for the mentees trying to ‘cut and paste’ just reflected the limited way they had been able to articulate their experiences. However, I felt the interviews with the mentees as a whole did reflect a strong sense of their feelings about the experience and I did not want to lose this through the coding process.

Thirdly, I began to feel that chunking that data according to particular key words and themes was fragmenting the stories and losing the meaningfulness of each mentor-mentee pair’s experience. Colley (2001b) was also faced with this issue in her work. Like Colley, I found that the dynamic relationship between the mentor-mentee pair began to be missed as categorising led to considering the data from the group perspectives of the mentors or mentees. I was not producing work that provided insights into the lived experience of each participant within the context of their own relationship. The categorising and coding technique was moving me away from my research aims.

Finally, I found that the use of categorisation from a parent file enabled me to draw out similarities between the participants’, however these became privileged over the uniqueness between the pairs. I knew from my interaction with the data up till this point that there were important differences between the participants’ stories. The categorisation method did not seem to enable me to flesh out in greater depth the distinctness of the differences and how these were lived and experienced by the mentor-mentee pair involved. Again, Colley (2001b), faced similar difficulties. I agreed with her point that engaging in comparative work through a discussion of similarities and differences between the stories of the participants threatens to lose the opportunity of gaining in depth insights from small-scale studies such as this one.

These tensions led me to think more broadly about the ways in which I could analyse the data and led me to make some modifications of the categorisation/coding technique, use of a narrative approach and reconceptualise the overall framework of analysis.

At this point I shifted the conceptual frame from which I was approaching data analysis work. The approach I had taken was to pool the data into a parent file and draw out the similarities and differences from there, but as highlighted above tensions emerged using this method. I shifted to thinking about each mentor-mentee pair as a single case. I found that each of the relationships I had studied fell into the description of a “unique bounded system” that Sakes
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(2000) uses to illustrate when a case study analysis is useful. I chose to think about each mentor-mentee pair as a ‘unique bounded system’ with its own individuality and worthy of its own description. Using this approach enabled me to learn what was common among the separate cases, but it gave equal emphasis to the uniqueness and distinguishing features of each case that were becoming increasingly important the more I worked with the data. Taking a case study approach enabled me to learn from and understand in a greater depth the lived experience of each of the mentor-mentee relationships.

In response to the recognition that I had unintentionally begun to construct the data according to a particular theoretical framework I chose to write narratives of each pair’s relationship from the perspective of both the mentor and mentee. This idea comes from Polkinghorne (1988) and was used as a way to reconnect with the data, ‘bracket’ my existing knowledge and reposition myself as someone learning about these relationships for the first time. The purpose was to tease out a representation of the relationship without the bias of theoretical frameworks. It was an attempt to avert the temptation of seeking data that fitted into a particular way of understanding the experiences. At the heart of each story was the relationship and how it was described by those involved. Writing the narratives served to confirm the struggle I had with my original attempt at categorisation; that the uniqueness of each story was central to understanding the experience. Put in narrative form these distinguishing features increased their importance as integral parts of each story. The narratives were based on the transcripts of the interviews for each of the mentor-mentee pairs. In the process of writing them I kept as close to the data as possible, even using the terminology and language of each of the ‘characters’ as much as I could.

At this point I turned back to categorisation and coding as a technique but it was with a new conceptual frame which proved to be much more effective than my first attempt. I categorised and coded each of the interviews as separate documents rather than pooling them together. This meant that each of the interviews had its own categories which were further broken down through coding that related specifically to the interview. I found it useful to separate the mentor and mentee interviews into separate entities because of the differences between them. In the process of writing each case the mentor and mentee stories were brought back together.

I used a three stage process in this part of the analysis. I began by reading through the transcripts quickly and at the end of that reading jotting down the issues that ‘jumped out at me’ or appeared to be particularly important in light of the research objective. These formed the basis of categories which on second and third readings became more refined. These first
categories were also informed by the narratives because these stories had illuminated salient and unique features of the ‘character’s’ experience. The second reading was more thorough and detailed in which the data was coded into various categories. I used blocks of text where it was appropriate preferring to keep paragraphs of importance together rather than coding line by line. This approach enabled the telling of the experience to retain meaningfulness when at times important information was embedded among information that seems irrelevant. The third reading was to monitor my process by checking any uncoded data for its relevance. This was relevant not only to the categories I had constructed but the story as a whole in case data that had escaped categorisation added valuable information. Using a three stage process not only ensured accuracy and completeness in the coding process but also increased my sense of ‘knowing’ the data which proved to be beneficial during the writing stages of the project.

The last analytic tool I used was to draw up a table of the questions I asked mentors and mentees and the responses I was given. The purpose of this was to situate myself in the analysis process and determine if the uniqueness between pairs that arose in the analysis could be attributed to differences in the interviews. This kind of analysis consequently made obvious the following; when I had asked particular questions of some respondents but not others, any information respondents have offered that I have not asked about, and the differences between the responses to the same question. I found this technique stimulated new insights and was a valuable part of the analysis process.

### 3.4 Summary

I initially used a typical approach to analysing qualitative data and found that the experience of the participants became lost in categories and codes. After reconceptualising the overall frame of analysis to a case study approach I was able to modify my use of coding to more fully develop an understanding of the separate mentor-mentee pairs involved in the study. This process, coupled with some narrative ways of thinking about the data and an analysis of questions and responses, provided analytic tools that enabled the lived experience of the participants to be described and interpreted during the course of this project.
Chapter 4  STORIES OF THE MENTORS AND MENTEES

This chapter is made up of accounts of the relationships I studied from both the mentor and mentee's perspective. Prior to this is an account of the District Truancy Service (DTS) which provides the organisational context in which the mentoring relationships are situated. All of the accounts are descriptive in nature. They have been put together based on the transcripts of the interviews and have been a way of retelling what was expressed to me. I have left them as descriptive in this chapter because each of these accounts has a distinct flavour that I did not want to lose among general trends. For this reason I have included all the stories in depth before moving onto the kind of insight they have given me into the mentoring process in chapters, five and six. The order of this chapter is as follows: the story of the DTS, Elizabeth and Zara, Matthew and Glen, Roger and Caleb and finally Krista and Dylan. There is no particular significance to this order.
4.1 The District Truancy Service Story – setting the context

Brief History

The DTS mentoring programme has been running for four years. It is a small part of the DTS operation. It was originally set up to try and provide a positive proactive role in helping students remain at school. There have been two mentoring managers who have co-ordinated the programme. The managers are responsible for recruiting and supporting mentors, liaising with families, and matching mentors and mentees. The second mentoring manager was coordinating the programme at the time the participants I interviewed were involved. He had no prior experience with the mentoring concept but is known in the community for giving time to organisations like this. He was asked to take on the role. The mentoring manager is employed by and reports to the DTS Trustboard.

Beliefs of the mentoring manager

(i) About the mentees

He did not believe that the young mentees had appropriate peer groups that encouraged achievement and attendance at school. He considered that these children often came from single parent families who had difficulties of their own which made it harder to encourage their children at school. He felt that many of the authority figures young people encountered were male, that their fathers were often transient and therefore they often did not have positive male role models they respected. He believed that matching someone with the young person who was enthusiastic about spending time with them and who could subtly point out that “it’s not such a bad thing to be at school” would be beneficial for the young person.

(ii) About the mentors

He believed that people involved in further education placed a high value on education that he hoped could be passed on to the young people they mentored. He considered them mature, responsible adults with high education and training who could use good judgement to work out a positive relationship with the young person. He saw his role as providing support to the
mentors and he made himself available to them if they ever needed it. He valued the time they were giving very highly, considering that "any student worth their salt is heavily committed to their studies". Because their time was given voluntarily he felt it was important to be protective of the mentor if it was needed. This ranged from ensuring they were not put in any danger with a mentee who had drug use or extreme violence issues and making sure they were reimbursed for any expenses they incurred. The mentoring manager saw his role as being there for the mentors. He rang them once a month to check in and would always offer advice face-to-face if it was necessary. He was committed to looking after the mentors. He had much less contact with the mentees.

(iii) About mentoring relationships

The purpose of the mentoring relationship was to establish a way to support students to attend school of their own volition. He believed that the focus of the relationships was targeting school attendance. In his view, school attendance or gaining employment by the young person was the mark of a successful mentoring relationship. If the relationship moved beyond the primary focus of targeting school attendance, or continued after this aim had been met he considered this outside the focus of the program. While he put no parameters on how the relationships were to operate and he was encouraging of their development into friendship relationships he stressed that this had very little to do with him and that how the relationship developed was over to the two individuals concerned.

Recruitment and Selection

Mentors were recruited from tertiary training establishments. The mentoring manager believed that people at these establishments valued their education highly and were achievers. These were the kind of people that he believed were in the best position to influence and help young people who were disengaging from school. It was hoped that the mentors would be able to provide practical help, for example with school work while at the same time encourage better school habits that would lead to a desire to attend by the mentees.

Potential mentors were required to fill out an application form which highlighted their interests and skills. It also consented to a police check which all mentors had to have (refer to Appendix F). The application form was the first means of selection to become a mentor. The form required some reflection by the applicant about how they describe themselves and the
goals they would have as a mentor. This information seems to have been used as an indicator of the person’s suitability to be a mentor, but was not used beyond that. The second use of the form was to gain information about the applicant’s interests and hobbies, availability, and car status in order to be able to match an applicant with a mentee. The form also had a safety element requiring applicants to state any criminal convictions and it gave consent to a police check.

Applicants then met with the mentoring manager. This meeting was more about providing information to the potential mentor than interviewing the person for suitability to become a mentor. The meeting was the opportunity for the mentoring manager to explain the sometimes difficult circumstances the applicant would face becoming a mentor because of the peer associations and home background the young people had. It was the opportunity to highlight that the qualities needed were the ability to be “firm, friendly, non-judgemental and motivated with a bit of fun ... as they may be the only good friend the youngster has” (Report to the DTS Trustboard, 2001). Those applicants that were still interested after this went on to complete training.

Mentees were referred to the mentoring programme through the truancy officers. Young people who were targeted were usually considered to be on the fringes of truancy. This may mean they were often late to class, or missing classes in the morning or the afternoon, or missing some classes but staying on the school grounds. The truancy officers did not refer young people they perceived or knew were using drugs or were potentially violent. The truancy officers approached the parents/caregivers and the young person to offer them the opportunity of becoming involved with the mentoring program. The mentoring manager considered that it was often the parents who were more interested at that stage than the young people. He suggested that for parents who may already be having difficulty encouraging their children to go to school this was seen as a type of assistance. If the parents and/or the young person decided to become involved they were then referred to the mentoring manager. A form was filled out either by the truancy officer, the parents or the student that asked for basic demographic information, health issues, interests, and why the student could benefit from having a mentor (refer to Appendix G).
Training

Training consisted of two 4 hour sessions run over a weekend. The first session provided an introduction into the Truancy Service and the activities of the attendance officers, the legal status of mentors and what is required and restricted by law, and information on motivation including goal setting. This session concluded with time for role plays. The second session developed ideas about human relationships and discussed the connections between the mentor, student and family. This session also included a question and answer period from both a current mentor and the mentoring manager. It does not appear that a mentee was invited to speak alongside the mentor.

The beginning of the relationship – initial meetings

A paper ‘match’ was made by the mentoring manager. This was based primarily on the interests the menior and mentee indicated on their forms. Any specific requests by the mentor in terms of age, sex or location were also considered.

Once this match had been made the mentoring manager visited with the parents/caregivers and the student. His main concern in this meeting was to ensure the mentee was aware of the commitment the mentor was making which meant there was a responsibility of the part of the young person to follow through with any arrangements the pair made together. Part of the meeting was also to ensure that the caregivers/parents and young person were aware of roles and lines of communication. For example, neither the mentor or the young person was required to report to the parent or the manager about the time they spent together. If there was a need to raise concerns, the mentoring manager made himself available to the mentors to discuss anything. Mentors were also referred to the supervisor. The young people however did not have a support person other than their parents or caregivers. Although parents could contact the mentoring manager he also made it clear that the mentors were his first priority.

After this meeting in which the obligations of the mentee were made clear, an initial meeting with the mentor was held. The mentoring manager was also present at this meeting. The mentee and parent or caregiver were again asked to state their support to the program clarity was sought that they all understood the relationship was between the mentor and the student and parents were not to be involved unless the mentee chose, or there were difficult circumstances. At this point the mentor and student would have the opportunity to spend a
short period of time together and on their own arrange a second meeting if they decided they wanted one. From this point on the mentoring manager had little to do with the relationship between the mentor and student.

**Monitoring**

The mentoring manager met with the parents of the mentees either in the middle or at the end of the year. He considered this a social call to catch up on how the mentoring was going. The two parents whom I spoke to both considered him to be pleasant and helpful. He had even less contact with the mentees beyond the initial meeting. His perception was that the mentees saw him as an authority figure. His rationale was that most people who were in positions of authority that these young people were dealing with were male, for example the truancy officer or police. In this situation where he was arranging an intervention for behaviour that was not condoned his presence was also seen as an authority figure. I would suggest that it was the manner in which the mentoring manager related to the students that is as likely to have contributed to the student’s feelings.

The mentoring manager connected with the mentors via a phone call each month. They were also able to attend supervision fortnightly, which some did while others did not seek it out. Beyond this there was limited contact between the mentors and the program unless they initiated it.

The mentoring manager had no contact with the school. Any communication between the school and the mentoring program was through the attendance officers. In most cases there was no information sharing or connection between the school and the people involved with the program. On the one or two occasions where mentors did seek contact with the school they did have the opportunity to do this directly rather than through a chain of people. In the main however the mentoring manager distanced himself from the school and this consequently distanced the mentors.

It seems both the school and family contexts were domains that the mentoring manager did not see as important for him or the mentors to be involved in. This is interesting considering the primary aim of the program is to reduce truancy which is often related to home and/or school characteristics.
Summary

The mentoring manager influenced the culture of the mentoring programme during the time the mentors and mentees in this study were involved. His personal philosophies and way of working ran through the operation of this programme. This has had implications which are discussed in chapter six.
4.2 Elizabeth (mentor) and Zara (mentee) – their story

“I would say if they're little bastards just put up with their shit if you want to keep being a mentor but otherwise just get along with them as well. And don’t make yourself out to be real picky and nah, nah, nah about school and stuff. Don't talk about school like all the time. Like bring it up but don't talk about it heaps. Because if these people actually. ‘Cause see I was never really, "Oh I hate school I can't do it ra, ra, ra." But if people were going to be mentored that were like that then you wouldn't want to pressure them about heaps. So that's what I would say, "Don't pressure them heaps about it.""

This is a provocative quote from Zara that embodies some significant advice for would-be mentors. As this and the following stories reveal, “putting up with their shit”, “getting along” and “not being too picky” is often difficult to reconcile into the role of a mentor when mentors have their own expectations and hopes as does the program they are volunteering for. All these are vying for attention. It is likely though, that if advice like this is not given attention mentees will exercise resistance in subtle and unintentional but powerful ways.

Elizabeth’s background – the road to a mentoring experience

The conversations I had with Elizabeth reveal there were some implicit assumptions, that had developed mostly from her past experiences, she brought with her to the mentoring relationship that guided the way she thought about and acted in the relationship. The assumptions and values that emerged for Elizabeth appear to be influential in both how she conceptualised and acted in the role of a mentor.

Briefly these are as follows. Firstly, she has had volunteering experience in the past that has influenced the expectations she had about the kind of student she would be working with and the role she would need to take. Secondly, she has a strong commitment to volunteering, which influenced her commitment to the role. Thirdly, she places a high value on education, which influenced her assumptions about the kind of role she should have. Finally, she also believes that education, while important, can only be achieved when the basic needs of
shelter, food, love and care are met. These values have been expanded in the following sections.

**Past Volunteering History**

Elizabeth has a history of volunteering. During her medical degree she had a break for a year and travelled to the United Kingdom and back to the United States. While she was away she was involved in volunteer projects. In the United Kingdom she was working in a day care centre, which she really enjoyed. In the United States she was based on a Navaho Reservation where she did volunteer work in a boarding school. She worked alongside students who she described as having a bad attitude towards school, and who were unmotivated about school. She worked with students who at age 10 were unable to read and write. She explained that the students who had the most difficulties were often the ones who came from homes where education was not a priority, and where sometimes the basic supports of love, care and affection were missing. We talked at some length about her experience on the Reservation which provided some insights into some of the implicit assumptions Elizabeth had developed. These had an effect on the way she preconceived her role as a mentor.

Elizabeth’s volunteering role consisted of helping with homework, working with students who had difficulty with reading, writing and maths after school, and working alongside the health teacher during the day. She also did particular projects. One of these was helping the students to set up their own “student executive committee”. Her rationale for this idea was that students needed something to “own” and run themselves, which would provide them with a greater sense of purpose in the school. She hoped it would go some way towards changing the unmotivated and uninspired attitudes she witnessed at the school. In her opinion she felt students responded positively to this intervention. She also considered that she had a mentoring role in this position.

Through our discussion about her role on the Indian Reservation, it became apparent that Elizabeth had begun the Truancy Service mentoring program with pre-existing ideas about the kind of student she would mentor. She had expected they would be similar to those she had worked with overseas. Interestingly, before our interview discussion she had not considered that she had any preconceived ideas about the role of a mentor. However our conversation revealed that the way Elizabeth had conceptualised her role prior to beginning the mentoring
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relationship was linked to her experience on the Indian Reservation, as the following quote indicates:

"I sort of expected to have a kid like that. Maybe more like some of the kids I ran across on the Indian reservation who were just really odd, didn't go to school, school sucks. That sort of attitude and I guess what I was going to try to get into was to change that attitude and try and show somebody how school can be really good for whatever purposes and try and figure out what that person wants to do with their life and then show them how education can help them."

Also implicit in the above quote, and present throughout Elizabeth’s interview, is a sense of responsibility to use the skills she has to change and help students who have a negative attitude towards school. Elizabeth’s conversation with me about her role on the Indian Reservation and her conceptions of what mentoring was indicated that she particularly linked ‘helping’ in the context with Zara to an educational focus.

Commitment to Volunteering

The volunteering experience on the Indian Reservation also contributed to Elizabeth’s notions of volunteering in general. On return from the United States she became involved with the student executive for medical students. One of her goals was to encourage all medical students to be active volunteers.

"I came back from this year off and I was really determined to make med students do volunteer work. Med students of all people should do it. So I got on the student executive and that was going to be my big thing."

Unfortunately, she did not have much success with this aim. However, she did decide to become involved with the mentoring program herself. It is evident that Elizabeth is motivated by a sense of civic responsibility or duty to participate in an unpaid capacity to help others. This was expressed at a later point in the interview when Elizabeth considered that one of her motivations for remaining involved to the extent that she did was from a sense of duty.
“Maybe that's what I felt being a mentor was being pursuing it and being persistent to make sure that you keep in contact with the person. Yeah maybe that's what I thought. So I think the driving thing was just, "I'm supposed to be her mentor so I should keep in touch with her." A sense of duty.”

There is evidence from Elizabeth’s previous volunteering experience, and her understanding of volunteering that provide us with some indications about the kinds of internal or implicit guidelines that she began the mentoring experience with. Her past experiences both on the Indian Reservation, and her own school experiences have also meant she has a philosophy about education that she brings with her to the mentoring relationship.

**Educational Values**

Elizabeth has a family background that prioritised education. Her parents were both teachers and sent Elizabeth to private schools that prioritised academics. Students who attended these schools were aiming for entry into top universities. Elizabeth considers that the values her parents encouraged at home were influential in the philosophy she developed about working hard and learning at school. The schools she went to were a reflection of the values her parents instilled at home.

Elizabeth continues to place a high value on education. The way she conceptualised the role of a mentor was most often linked to ways in which she could influence students to achieve more through education. However she also values being motivated and inspired to learn, as was shown by her efforts on the Indian Reservation. Her experience on the Reservation also contributed to her philosophy of education. She has participated in two different educational worlds and as a result she has developed ideas about education that reflect thoughtful consideration of each. Elizabeth states this succinctly in the following quote:

“I really believe that education is a luxury you can only get, that you can only focus on and only really appreciate once you have all the other bits and pieces of life that help you like getting food and having shelter. But even things like having a support network and having someone who loves you and takes care of you and all that. If you don’t have that, even if you
know that education is really important you can’t really focus on it because your day to day routine is so not stable”.

Training from the DTS

As well as the implicit guidelines from her personal experience, Elizabeth also began the relationship with some explicit guidelines she received from the truancy service through training sessions. Before beginning the program mentors were required to attend two three hour training sessions where basic communication skills and safety issues about being a mentor were discussed. The training provided some explicit ideas about the role of mentors. Elizabeth said she did not find this particularly useful. However the conversations we had together indicated that guidelines from the training did influence how she perceived her role. The following quote illustrates what Elizabeth took from these ideas.

“They [the DTS training group] gave examples like if they’re - try and figure out why they're not going to school. Then if you can figure out why they're not going to school try and help them. Like if it's because they always get up too late then do something like call them up in the morning to make sure they get up on time. That really practical stuff. So I guess I'd assumed that I'd sort of be in that same position. Sort of try to figure out why they're not going to school and then try and get them to go back to school.”

Alongside these guidelines the DTS also suggested that mentors needed simply to “be a friend” to the students. This notion of being a friend had implications for the way Elizabeth experienced her relationship with Zara because it contributed to the way Elizabeth thought about and acted in her role as a mentor.

The road to mentoring – Zara’s personal characteristics

Zara’s values that were revealed during the course of the conversation appear to provide her with implicit guidelines about how she will respond to interactions with adults. Firstly, there were a number of indications that Zara values having authority over herself. The stories she tells in her interview suggest she moves away from adults she interprets as authority figures who attempt to control her, and draws closer to adults who treat her more like an equal or a friend. Related to this she also seems to value having the responsibility and right to make her
own decisions and choices, and believes others individuals can do the same. There are a number of examples (see below) that indicate how these values provide her with implicit guidelines which influence her behaviour and thoughts.

**Defining things to suit her own view**

When Zara was truanting from school she was brought to the attention of the truancy service. The pattern of her truancy was one that is common. She began by missing just the classes she found uninteresting or those in which she did not relate to the teacher. She then began going to school in the morning but skipping in the afternoon, until she no longer went to school in the mornings, and was missing the whole day. Despite Zara missing school in this way, she did not consider herself a ‘truant’. When I asked her if she would have described herself as a truant this was her response:

“Not really. I don't think I'm truant. When I was back in the 4th form I mean I used to bunk like after lunch and stuff like that I just couldn't be bothered going to class. It was just things that I didn't like. So I was just thinking oh I don't want to go to this. So I'm not going to go. Just stuff like that. I wasn't too scared to go or it wasn't too difficult for me. It was just me saying, "Oh I don't want to." It was just me doing what I wanted to do.”

Zara’s school attendance at the time of the interview (two years after she was considered a ‘truant’) also reflects her will to make her own decisions. Consistent with her beliefs about choice, she regards that her behaviour now is a result of realising that if she wanted to achieve her goals to get to university to be a lawyer or a judge she needed to be at school. This has resulted in a decision to stay at school, and attend most classes, until year 13 (seventh form).

When I asked Zara if Elizabeth had helped her go back to school, Zara was quick to point out that she did not believe she needed help, although she could appreciate Elizabeth in a supportive role:

“I don't need help to get an education anymore. I can do it myself now ... I didn't really need help though. I don't think I needed help. I was bunking and I was still making my own decisions but she made me think about the decisions I was making.
Another indication that Zara values being able to make her own decisions, is that she considers others also have a right, or a responsibility to make their own decisions as well. This was evident when Zara and I talked about whether she would consider being a mentor to someone. It was not appealing to her because she wouldn’t want to be with students she labels “ratbags” who are making choices to be that way.

“Oh like there's kids at my school that just go round picking fights and just real little scruffy little do you know what I mean. Like don't go to class, swear at the teachers, always in detention just people like that. I wouldn't want to do it with someone like that. I'd just say, "Oh yeah good on you. Choose your own path." Type thing... no it's their decision they can just do what they want”.

Chasing Control Over Herself

There are four salient examples from the conversation I had with Zara which indicate she places a high value on maintaining authority over herself and this guides her interactions with others, and with adults in particular.

At the point where Zara was no longer making it to school for any part of the day the truancy service became involved in her school attendance. A truancy officer would pick Zara up from her house and take her to school. Although this appears to be an act of authority from the Truancy Officer which left little choice for Zara, she responded positively to the truancy officers intervention. She provides a good description of why this was the case.

"he just didn't seem like a person of authority. He was just like quite cruisy. Like he used to just talk like a normal person like he would say, "sh*t." And whatever. He wouldn't like, really you know. He wasn't like a teacher kind of person, he was quite cool. And he, yeah, he was quite cool.”

A common theme throughout the interview, that is present in the above quote, is Zara’s negative use of the word “teacher”. She often uses it as a descriptive phrase, but uses it to express negative qualities. When she uses it to describe the truancy officer and Elizabeth, it is used as the opposite of what they are like. For example with reference to Elizabeth, these were ways Zara described their relationship.

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“It's not really like a whole teacher, student kind of help me stay at school like person. It's not like that.”

“She kind of like said stuff about school but she didn't say it in like a teachery kind of way.”

It is evident from these comments that the kind of authority she moves away from is the kind she associates with teachers at school.

This continues to be the situation for Zara. Just prior to our interview she had chosen to bunk from her science classes (while still attending all her others). Her rationale for this was:

"'Cause the only reason I never used to go to science is because I hated the teacher. And he hated me too and I could just tell. And he was from the army and he was real strict. So I hated him so I changed and now I've got a better teacher."

This again shows Zara has a strong reaction to rules and strictness that are imposed on her from figures she does not concede have an authoritative role in her life.

As well as missing school during her time with Elizabeth, Zara was also going through particularly chaotic living circumstances. She had been living with a foster family for the past two years. She had a difficult relationship with her mother prior to being fostered. The foster family she was with decided that they no longer wanted to foster so she was moved to a family home. She found this home to be very strict and at one point ran away. This was also in the midst of not being at school. Child, Youth and Family were involved and the resolution was that Zara would return to the original foster home, but would become a private boarder. This was arranged with the help of Zara’s mother. Zara and her mother have a good relationship now, but her mother lives overseas.

The time she was placed in the family home also indicates her resentment of strict rules and guidelines that are imposed on her. She describes the home as “a real whack” which translated means it was very strict. Her response to being there was to run away.

These examples suggest Zara reacts strongly to people who are rule oriented and try to impose rules on her. When adults are able to relate to her as a friend, or as she often puts it they can
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“talk normally” and not be “teachery”, she usually responds positively and with enthusiasm. It appears that in these situations Zara feels she has more capacity to make her own decisions, which is also something she implicitly values.

Elizabeth and Zara’s Interactions

The values, assumptions, and guidelines that Zara and Elizabeth bring with them to the relationship enables us to understand in a greater depth how and why their relationship works in the way it does. I believe it is important to qualify that Elizabeth and Zara’s personal characteristics should not be considered complete in the form I have presented them. There are multitudes of influences of this type and it is likely I have only just begun to uncover a few. However, it does provide enough information to be able to think about the many factors that influence how mentoring relationships develop between people.

There are two salient features of Elizabeth and Zara’s relationship that can be understood within the context of Elizabeth and Zara’s personal characteristics. The first is that Elizabeth felt continually frustrated in her role as a mentor but was able to build a positive relationship with Zara, and the second is that Zara considered the experience positive and worthwhile.

From the beginning Zara did not act in the way that Elizabeth had conceptualised based on her past experiences. This meant that the role Elizabeth had envisaged was not particularly useful. There was a gap between what Elizabeth expected and Zara’s behaviour and attitude to school.

"Oh cool I’m really going to get into this and try and figure out why this person’s opposed to school, try and motivate them and try and do something. But that was just never there with Zara.”

The gap between expectations and reality, Elizabeth’s implicit assumptions about her role, the value she placed on education and Zara’s consideration she did not need a mentor meant Elizabeth was uncertain about the role she should have with Zara. Elizabeth’s implicit values meant education and schooling remained her focus for being able to help Zara. This was usually in the form of talking about school and this was the part of her relationship that she considered ‘mentoring’. Her implicit assumptions remained influential in her understanding of mentoring to the extent that participation in the experience served to ignite a sense of
uncertainty, confusion, and failure in her helping role. This led her to the conclusion that Zara never really needed a mentor and she could have been better utilised with a different student.

“I guess I don't really feel like I really did the mentoring programme because I don't really feel Zara needed a mentor and I don't really feel I helped her or anything at all. You know. So my advice would be more to the mentor programme saying well why don't you either figure out exactly who needs a mentor. 'Cause I, like I feel like I could have made a bigger difference in somebody else's life another kids life rather than hers.”

Despite Elizabeth’s feelings of uncertainty about her usefulness, she had a strong ethic of commitment to remain persistent with Zara and be her mentor. Elizabeth’s commitment was demonstrated by a little book she gave me in which she recorded some of the things Zara had told her so she could remember the names of her friends, and the things she liked and disliked. Interestingly, Zara remarked during our interview how “cool” she thought it was that Elizabeth always remembered lots of details about her and her friends. This example highlights that although Elizabeth made an effort to help Zara with her school issues, she was also committed to forming and maintaining a relationship with Zara even when she struggled to perform the role she had envisaged.

It seems that this approach matched Zara’s desire to remain independent and in control of herself. Elizabeth became more like a friend, or an equal, than a person who was trying to control or guide her. So while Elizabeth was left with frustrations, Zara responded positively to the relationship Elizabeth was offering and considered her a friend.

The notion of friendship is a consistent descriptive Zara uses when she talks about her conception of the relationship she has with Elizabeth. Elizabeth was someone who was available to Zara, she was consistently and reliably “there”, she listened to Zara and remembered details of her other friendships and life circumstances, she was trustworthy, they shared in activities together and they had fun. Zara also consistently describes Elizabeth as someone who put a different perspective on things and helped her think about the decisions she was making without doing it in an authoritative way. In fact, it seems she was adept at relating to Zara in ways Zara regarded as friendship.

Although Zara considers the relationship a friendship, Elizabeth does not. She considers that they were able to get along well together and they enjoyed each others company, and on this
level considers their relationship a success. However, Elizabeth does not consider her relationship with Zara to be a friendship. It seems Elizabeth conceptions of friendship included characteristics that are not yet as important for Zara. For example, a relationship that is reciprocal, where personal self-disclosure occurs, and one that does not require conscious effort or persistence:

“It wasn’t like a friendship that I would have with somebody my own age because I always felt that I was there as a rule as a mentor so it wasn’t really appropriate for me to talk about my personal life or problems that I’m having”

“Because the one thing that I found really hard about the whole thing was I felt it actually was something that I was consciously doing rather than with a friend where it’s sort of just casual and you don’t have to work on it as much”

“I felt like I had to be persistent. Which is more that I would be for a friend. So that’s why for me it wasn’t a normal. It wasn’t just a friendship”

It seems that conceptions of friendships could be playing a significant role in the way the relationship is perceived, particularly for Elizabeth.

Highlighted from this illustration is that the truancy service advice in training to “be a friend” to the student was not a meaningful construct for Elizabeth to work towards. Her conceptions of friendships have developed with her age and experience and are now different to the conceptions that Zara may have. So while Elizabeth is functioning as a friend to Zara, she does not perceive it this way because her expectations of friendship are more than what Zara is offering. In this sense the role of “being a friend” is also not met for Elizabeth which has contributed to her sense of confusion and uncertainty about her role as Zara’s mentor.

**Summary**

In this relationship the kind of mentoring Elizabeth was offering was not what Zara responded to. The expectations Elizabeth had of her role were resisted by Zara. Instead the relationship that developed became defined by the way Zara did respond to Elizabeth, which was to see
her as an “adult friend” whom she could talk with about “normal stuff”. She resisted too much pressure about school issues which meant their relationship largely became oriented towards friendship type interactions. While this was fulfilling for Zara in many ways it left Elizabeth unsatisfied and unable to fulfil her own or the program’s expectation of the role. Coupled with this was Elizabeth’s realisation that Zara’s truancy was impacted by her chaotic living circumstances and relationships with teachers which she as a mentor could do little about. She had no connection to the family or school systems that were impacting on Zara. It seems that because Elizabeth had a strong appreciation that basic needs such as stability, love, care, attention and support were necessary before education could become a focus she was able to in some ways provide some of this for Zara. However, despite this she remained unconvinced that she had been successful as a mentor, or that Zara really needed mentoring on the basis of the program’s aims.
4.3 Matthew (mentor) and Glen (mentee) – their story

Brief family and educational histories

Matthew and Glen come from strikingly diverse backgrounds and different educational experiences. Matthew comes from a professional family with both parents as part of the family. His parents were explicit in ensuring their children knew they were loved and cared for. In contrast, Glen comes from a foster home which he has been in for eight years. Glen’s experiences before the foster home are of neglect and psychological and sexual abuse. He accesses numerous support agencies, including counselling, respite care, and a programme for early prevention of sexual offending. He has also been diagnosed with behavioural difficulties. His foster mother provides him with some stability. She is motivated to ensure she does what she can to help avoid Glen developing more serious problems that could lead to more serious consequences later in life. Glen’s educational experiences include difficulties with learning, poor teacher attention and social exclusion, to the point where he chose to be absent from classes to avoid conflict with other students. Matthew by comparison, achieved highly at school, fitted the system, made friends easily and excelled in sport. He is now pursuing a career as a doctor and is in the process of completing his medical degree.

Matthew’s motivation for becoming a mentor

For Matthew, these differences were not unexpected. His identification with a ‘non-problematic’ background was one of his motivations for becoming involved with the mentoring program. Matthew decided that it would be a good way of gaining insight into
what life has been like for a person who comes from a more difficult background than his own. He also rationalised that he had no responsibilities other than himself and he felt mentoring was a good opportunity to give some time to someone outside of himself:

“At the time I didn’t put my name down. And then a couple of weeks later I guess I thought, “Oh why not” I guess. There’s just me I have to worry about I don’t have responsibilities to anybody else I suppose. I thought it would be quite good in that way. I also thought it would be quite good in terms of getting a bit of an insight on what it’s been like or what it’s like for other people. Just for my own personal benefit. ‘Cause I’ve been pretty lucky. I haven’t had really any problems at all in life.”

It is noteworthy that missing from this description is the notion of ‘making a difference’ to the student. Although Matthew does have some expectations about this they were expressed less directly in our conversations. Of note here is the idea of personal development through mentoring. It appears that Matthew hoped to develop himself through the connection with someone who was different from himself. Matthew has a history of this kind of orientation as his experience on his medical elective suggests (part of the medical degree is to spend three months practising medicine in a place of choice internationally). He was in Zimbabwe, Africa, where he was in a position of high AIDS risk and working in poverty conditions.

Glen’s motivation for having a mentor

One of the considerations Glen made when he was deciding whether to have a mentor, and in fact his understanding of a mentor was having a person who was there to do activities with. He believed his foster mother helped get him one because she had other commitments which meant he was not always able to do activities he wanted to:

“Because I wouldn’t shut up to _____ [about playing mini-golf] so she got me a mentor to do stuff.”

Glen remembers that at first he was undecided if he wanted a mentor. He was nervous about what to expect. However because Glen “wanted to go out” it meant he quickly became eager to spend time with Matthew and “couldn’t wait for him to arrive”. Running strongly throughout the conversation I had with Glen was an emphasis on activity and the things he
and Matthew did together as the basis of their relationship. Like wise when Matthew was away for a few months the things Glen missed were going out with him and doing activities. This indicates Glen places a high value on doing activities and having fun with Matthew. This is what he expected from the relationship and what he found the most enjoyable.

**Potential challenges to the relationship**

Matthew reflected on the kind of barriers that could make relating to Glen more difficult. It seems that this was a valuable practise for him to do as it meant when the relationship was not always functioning in the way Matthew had hoped he had more awareness of the kinds of things that he may need to try and overcome with Glen. The barriers he identified included historical barriers, which he labelled “culture and lifestyle differences”, their diverse backgrounds their educational experiences fit into this label. He also identified barriers that were more ‘current’. These included that the relationship did not develop spontaneously, and that it is often one-sided. As well as this, Matthew was aware that the age difference between them was a challenge to developing the relationship.

“[There are] barriers that are set up through history (in a sense) and barriers that are appearing now ... The culture and lifestyle differences between kind of people with Glen’s background ... Compared to mine ... which is the complete opposite end of the spectrum. And at school ... I just sailed through compared to Glen ... He’s not really into any sport at all. If he was I’m not sure how successful he’d be. In some ways we’re completely opposite. Then the fact that makes it hard now is that it’s not a spontaneous relationship. It’s quite a one sided relationship in some ways.”

It appears that Matthew’s orientation towards learning about Glen, putting himself in a position of learning about someone different from himself, as well as thinking about and recognising some of the potential challenges in the relationship meant Matthew has primarily focused on getting to know Glen and building a relationship with him. This is in contrast to prioritising the goals of the program or his own expectations.
Re-conceptualising the role

At this point it is worth noting that Matthew also began the experience with some explicit assumptions about the role he would have as a mentor but it appears that these were loosely defined even to himself:

“Before I even meet him I figured I’d be sort of like a “role model”. In some ways provide sort of a bit of subtle peer pressure or not so subtle peer pressure. And then subtly I was optimistic that I would see he improved noticeably and then help with homework. And then when I met him I don’t think I had too many expectations after that. Just really see how it went and make sort of set goals and that.”

Matthew took an approach that did not assume his expectations were the correct way to ‘mentor’, instead he continually re-conceptualises the role to work with Glen in a way that develops their relationship.

“I don’t think Glen would appreciate it at all if I turned up and said, “Right we’re not doing anything today we’ll just do some maths.” If I hadn’t adjusted the way I did things it probably wouldn’t have worked.”

This is a theme that continually appears throughout the conversation I had with Matthew. Even the kind of advice he would have for others considering becoming a mentor emphasises that expectations are best not to have and it is unlikely the results you do see will be what you expect:

“Don’t expect any results. And don’t expect the results you get”

However while Matthew only had loosely defined ideas about the kind of role he had, and he did make a shift in focus, there does appear to be a tension for him between wanting his help to make improvements for Glen, and just wanting to get along side him and make their connection a fun thing to be part of:

“Perhaps he gets more out of it than I thought. I do think he enjoys it. But I didn’t really feel I made much progress
There were indications from Matthew of hopes he had that by prioritising the relationship in the first instance, there would be a greater possibility to help with other goals later on. His conversation indicates that while he did not explicitly express a desire to ‘make a difference’ or to provide Glen with any kind of particular sort of ‘help’, this was implicitly part of his conceptualisation about the role, which contributed to the tension described above:

“As I’ve gone on I’ve wondered if I’ve really made any difference at all. So what was happening right up till this last term[is that] there was hardly any improving or wasn’t improving at all. He was getting worse if anything in terms of his outside behaviour. In terms of our relationship, it was probably progressing I guess. And I guess I just sort of saw the role as to just get on with him. And have fun for a couple of hours.”

This quote also illustrates how Matthew re-conceptualises his role with Glen constantly, despite the tensions it creates. Matthew’s priorities about developing the relationship seem to influence his perspective of what he can do as part of the relationship at different stages. At this particular point in their relationship it looks as if the most beneficial thing he can do is interact with Glen in a fun way that they both enjoy. Because Matthew is able to adjust his way of thinking about his role, this is a possible mechanism for their relationship to continue to develop, regardless of whether Glen makes improvements in other areas of his life.

On one occasion however, Matthew was feeling frustrated with the lack of connection and progress they had made together. In response to his frustrations he asked Glen to think about the reasons he was involved and what he wanted from the relationship. It seems that this process was beneficial for Matthew because he gained a sense of purpose in his role through seeking clarification from Glen about the role he was taking in the relationship. Interestingly Matthew does not remember the details of Glen’s response which could suggest that the actual role he was to perform was less important than a mutual understanding between them of the purpose.

“‘Cause I found that in the middle of the year – February, March something like that when everything was going wrong. And I was getting really frustrated so I tried to get him to think about what he wanted to get out of these mentoring sessions and what I wanted to get out of the mentoring sessions … I’m not sure how much it changed things but it was
good for me. I guess I’d thought about it already but I thought it was good for me to get an idea what he was thinking and for him to think about it a bit. And for him perhaps to hear what I was thinking as well.”

When Matthew felt that he and Glen were working together it seems to have given Matthew a sense that the relationship was worthwhile which provided him with a means for feeling satisfied with it.

Noticeable from these examples from Matthew is the absence of a significant ‘helping’ orientation and the need to have his original conception of the role met as a means to gain satisfaction from the relationship. Noticeably present is a commitment to building the relationship and figuring out ways of maintaining an interest in the relationship that were not reliant on heavy investment from Glen in terms of meeting external objectives. Although when Glen did make external improvements Matthew felt a sense of satisfaction from this, but not in terms of as a reward for effort he had put in personally.

*Glen’s reason for truancy*

Matthew met Glen after he had displayed some instances of truancy. His reason for truant behaviour was not to leave school altogether however, Glen could always be found somewhere on the school grounds, he had just chosen not to attend classes. Conversations with Glen revealed that he chose to act in this way as a coping mechanism for the social difficulties he was facing at school. It appears that there was a particular period after Matthew and Glen had been meeting for almost a year, when his truant behaviour became worse. Glen again cited the social difficulties he had as the reason he was finding it unpleasant to go to class:

“The kids were usually picking on me or doing stuff or threatening me. I just used to get really angry and thought I might smack them over, so I just decided not to go to class just to cause no casualties.”

Matthew too was aware that truancy was symptomatic of other issues for Glen from early on in the relationship:
“I don’t think the truancy was ever his big problem. [That was] the reason he came to the attention of the truancy service. But yeah the problem was he hated the school and he hated the people at school and wasn’t interested in what was going on there. And he wasn’t likely to go into town to the video arcades either. He was just wandering round the school. No body was paying attention to him in class in a positive way. And so he was just left to himself.”

As mentioned earlier, Matthew felt his influence was not making a difference to Glen’s school attendance. and in fact it worsened during some of the time he was mentoring Glen. However more recently Glen has shown improvements in his school attendance, achievement and behaviour. Interestingly though, these changes occurred while Matthew was away overseas for three months doing his medical elective. It was at this time that Glen’s school issues were referred to GSES (Group Special Education Services) and it was decided that Glen would attend Ashmore School. This is a school that caters for learners with particular needs and it was considered that Glen’s needs fitted with what the school provided. Glen made steady progress at this school. The way he talks about it indicates that he is a ware of some of the circumstances he needed to engage in learning and how they are different from the mainstream school he attended:

“They give you easier math’s and they teach you how to do it because it’s two teachers to five kids, it’s more easier, two teachers to five people it’s more easier, you get more help and you know what you’re doing quicker and all that. Not 30 kids and one teacher and they’re all yelling at you and screaming and putting their hands up and wanting help, it’s just confusing to one teacher”

“We play games, you get lots of breaks, and just heaps of things we do, it’s quite fun really. Better than the old school because like in art you actually get to do real things like make things out of concrete, you get to do what you want”

Noticeably in the conversations about truancy and Ashmore School is the factors that influenced Glen’s behaviour were not things that Matthew could have direct influence over. Matthew did not feel as if he had contributed to the changes in Glen’s school behaviour so he
did not receive intrinsic benefit from the idea that he had “helped” Glen. Rather, Matthew seems to feel proud of Glen for his own efforts in changing his situation:

“I’m not proud as such because I don’t think I had much to do with it. I’m sort of proud of him. I think he’s done really well.”

In response Matthew adjusted his role to fulfil different needs that were appropriate with regard to Glen’s changing circumstances:

“So perhaps, in terms of a future role if I can help him take the changes he’s made and build on them for the next terms and go back into a mainstream school he might cope better. [Because of] having made the progress and good communication. Hopefully, [I’m] optimistic.”

*Conversations between Matthew and Glen*

While Matthew could not directly influence Glen’s school behaviour, it seems that some conversations did occur between Matthew and Glen regarding school, for example Glen states:

“Matthew thought that me getting a good education was better than not going to school”

Glen also indicated that Matthew was the only person he talked to about any of his school issues. This was somewhat surprising considering the level of support he receives from other institutions in the community, in particular the counselling he receives. Indications from Glen through the interview were that he did not place a high importance on talking as part of their relationship, and it seems that when conversations do occur they are of a practical nature than focused on any issues Glen is presenting:

“If there’s nothing we want to talk about we won’t talk about it, and when we want to talk about it we talk about it … [we talk about what we do and when we do it and how much it’s going to cost and all that and what we’ve been doing all week if I’ve been having fun and yeah just all that sort of stuff]”
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It seems here that Glen chooses to take control over the kinds of things that they talk about. This was also illustrated by a comment of Matthew’s when he suggested that if he tried to steer conversations to a topic that was related to Glen’s behaviour or school issues Glen would often block the conversation:

“Yeah well it’s [conversation] probably more one way than. ‘Cause quite often I’ll try and pick things up and he dodges them, or blocks it off”

Matthew considers that the level of reciprocal interaction between them has improved since he first began meeting with Glen however having mutually engaging conversations about deeper issues is still a challenge in their relationship:

“It’s still quite difficult to have a conversation with him, to talk to him, to interact with him. But yeah. What he does and what he enjoys, what he did at school and what he did at the weekend. Quite simple conversations really.”

Emerging form Matthew and Glen’s different perspectives on talking is that they each place a different kind of meaning on firstly the importance of talking in general, and secondly the kind of conversations they have. For Matthew, talking is a way of deepening their relationship and interacting together, where as for Glen it appears that conversation happens when and if there is something to talk about. It does not seem to have a priority in the way he interacts with Matthew.

It is apparent that the conversations that Matthew did have with Glen about school related topics could only occur when Glen was in a space where he wanted to share. Interestingly though, Glen does consider Matthew to be a good person to talk to about his schooling:

“yeah, it was alright. (Pause) It was cool actually, I didn’t mind talking to him about it … he understands, he’s been through it”

Glen tells us that Matthew is good to talk to because he has “been through it”. Matthew’s schooling history shows that Matthew has not been through the kind of circumstances Glen has. However, it suggests that in some way Matthew was able to relate to Glen’s difficulties with schooling empathetically that created a space which gave Glen more encouragement to share with him.
It seems that school was part of their conversations, but much less explicitly than Matthew had first thought it would be. However, despite the less explicit nature of influence in terms of schooling, it appears that Matthew was still able to emphasise his belief of the importance of education because Glen was definitely aware of Matthew’s perspective. This was indicated when Glen suggested Matthew will be “wrapped” to discover his progress while Matthew was overseas.

**Motivation for staying involved**

For Glen having fun and sharing in activities together was his motivation for becoming involved with the program and an important part of the relationship. Spending time doing things with Matthew was what Glen looked forward to. For Matthew, as he continued in the relationship he made a commitment to get along with Glen and have fun with him when he realised this was important to Glen. It also became a means for Matthew to enjoy the time he committed to building a relationship with Glen. He considers that being able to have fun with your mentee is an important part of a mentoring relationship.

“Enjoy it. You guys enjoy it. If you don’t like it then you won’t look forward to it. If you look forward to it then you’ll both enjoy it. Mini-golf or building sandcastles on the beach or whatever, enjoy it.”

Matthew remained committed to staying in the relationship with Glen, even when it was sometimes unrewarding and frustrating. He also remained persistent during a year at medical school that had a particularly high and intense workload, while at the same time training extensively for a month long endurance race. Along with these reasons there are also others that indicate why Matthew continues to choose to be involved:

“If I don’t see him for a week or two he rings up. I sort of feel a bit of obligation. Sometimes it’s quite nice. Sometimes it’s just quite good to see him, catch up, see how he’s getting on. Whether he’s enjoying school or like he’s enjoying this school he’s at. It’s really good ...and it’s also quite fun to go and do kids things like go play mini golf or go to the hydroslide or go to the beach and play sand castles and stuff like that. So that’s quite good too.”
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Noteworthy is that Matthew’s motivation for remaining in the relationship does not seem to be contingent on the progress Glen makes as a direct result of the help he has offered. Rather it is a general interest in Glen’s improvements regardless of how much input he has been able to have. Also highlighted again is Matthew’s genuine enjoyment of the activities they do. It seems this is an important part of the relationship for him not only to maintain a relationship with Glen, but because it provides him with satisfaction from being in the relationship.

**Being friends**

One of the tensions that seems to exist for Matthew seems in some ways to be influenced by his approach to emphasis the relationship with Glen. The relationship itself became a more important focus than changes in behaviour and school attendance (although, as stated earlier, these things were always hoped for inside the relationship). Because of this though, it appears that Matthew had hopes about the kind of relationship that would emerge between him and Glen due to the emphasis he placed. He had some conceptions about what a successful mentoring relationship would look like:

“I guess one where the relationship gets deeper as you go on. And you’d become closer than you were ... I guess you’d want insight into how the other person feels, reacts ... in terms of the relationship that would be a success. One where you got to know each other more closely. Had a deeper relationship”

Noticeably, these ideas do link with Matthew’s motivations for becoming involved in the relationship. He hoped to gain insight about different life experiences in order to help with his own personal development. It is possible that Matthew felt the process of learning about Glen may have helped their relationship develop along the lines he speaks of above.

In reality though, this is not how Matthew perceives the relationship. He struggles to give it the label of friendship, and considers it quite a shallow relationship:

“Well I guess you’d call us friends. We wouldn’t be like normal friends. He’s sort of. He’s not sort of I’d ring up and say, “Oh why don’t we do this together. Why don’t we...” Just out of the blue. Generally we get along pretty well. It’s quite a shallow relationship I think.”

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There is a marked difference between getting along together and considering this way of relating a friendship. It is evident that Matthew has conceptions of what friendship is, as well as hopes about the kind of relationship he and Glen would have. Neither of these have been realised despite Matthew’s efforts at creating a relationship that did meet some of these expectations. Simultaneously though, Matthew was also aware that creating a relationship like the one he envisaged would be more difficult because of the unique challenges involved in a relationship of this kind. For example, Matthew considers the cultural and lifestyle differences between them, as well as the non-spontaneous nature of the relationship to be barriers that make it harder to form a relationship of the kind he conceptualised.

However, over the time they have been together, there have been some changes in the way they relate together that are important to acknowledge. Glen has begun to take more initiative in their relationship, he now rings Matthew to suggest they go out sometimes. Matthew seems to appreciate the beginning of a more reciprocal relationship:

“But it’s nice that he’s trying to make it into a relationship where [he initiates] “Let’s do things together, let’s help each other out.”

**Involvement with the DTS program**

Matthew quickly abandoned seeking support from the truancy service, although it was offered. This was principally because in the year he began mentoring Glen he had a number of commitments. He chose to continue to make time for Glen but not for on-going supervision. It seems that Matthew has been able to stay committed and interested in the relationship despite some frustrations and difficulties without the support of an outside program, and in fact Matthew and Glen now operate completely independently of the truancy service. This indicates that perhaps Matthew had personal characteristics which meant he did not need the kind of support on offer. Given his ability to find ways of thinking and acting in the relationship that mean it is beneficial for him as well as Glen, it is not surprising that Matthew has not needed to have the support on offer. However, he did suggest that it would be good to reconnect with the program as he feels that some kind of on-going support even just to meet with other mentors could be beneficial in some way.
Summary

Matthew had a flexible approach to his relationship with Glen. Although he held some ambitions to have a close relationship that helped Glen improve in school attendance and behaviour he consciously chose to enjoy the relationship even when these goals were not met. Glen emphasised the fun and time spent sharing activities aspects of the relationship. This was both his motivation for wanting a mentor and his reason for enjoying the relationship. Although he did talk with Matthew about school on occasion this did not have a high priority for Glen. This was reflected in the relationship and did cause Matthew some frustrations because he felt the relationship remained at a shallow level. Overall both Glen and Matthew were able to enjoy the relationship because having fun became meaningful for both of them which led to a greater sense of shared purpose. But despite this there did remain a tension for Matthew because the idea of a deeper relationship as time went on was not satisfied, which was one of his hopes and contributed to his idea of a successful mentoring relationship.
4.4 Roger (mentor) and Caleb (mentee) – their story

*Family and Educational backgrounds*

Roger provided limited information about his family, considering he had a “boring middle class upbringing”. This statement in itself does not reveal what his upbringing was like and unfortunately Roger did not elaborate further. However his description does indicate that he perceives differences between his own background and Caleb’s. So too does his description of this first impression of Caleb’s home. Roger reported he had been “stunned” at the house which was messy and dirty as well as the yelling that was occurring from Caleb’s mother and the other kids. Caleb comes from a large family. There are 13 children, not all of whom have the same father. They are aged between 23 years and infancy. Not all the children live at home, but live close-by if they do not. Caleb’s mother has a partner who lives with them at the present time. This person is not Caleb’s father. Caleb has an estranged relationship with his father. A recent incident in which Caleb’s father sold his bike for drug money and lied about it to him caused Caleb to no longer want to see him for the moment. Caleb has grandparents in a different city who he gets along well with and visits occasionally.

There have been a number of ‘Strengthening Families’ meetings held for Caleb, as well as separate meetings with teachers and schools. Caleb has previously been involved with the then Special Education Service and the Child, Youth and Family Department.

He has been excluded from one school and during the time of this project was stood down from a second. This is in contrast to Roger who had a seemingly straight forwards educational
history. He attended school up to seventh form, completed a science degree at university and did a secondary teaching diploma recently.

**Truancy Service Involvement**

Indicated from above, it can be assumed Caleb has had a number of issues which have referred him to various agencies and services. I do not have specific information about events leading up to referrals, however for the purposes of this project, the details provided are enough to indicated Caleb is a young person who is considered ‘at risk’.

While he was excluded from one school it took a number of months to place him into a new school. Upon beginning a new school Caleb was often late to school by 5 or 10 minutes. It was at this point that the Truancy Service became involved and he was linked with Roger. Caleb has no recollection of the Truancy Service’s involvement in his pairing with Roger. In fact he was unaware of what the Truancy Service is. It seems that for Caleb the relationship he shares with Roger is independent of a school or organizational connection as it has been continuing for 14 months (at the time of interview) without involvement from outside parties.

Roger linked with the Truancy Service every fortnight while the prior mentoring manager was involved, but lost contact when this person finished working for the programme. However, he continued to talk with the mentoring manager despite the fact that he was no longer formally involved in the programme. Roger has been dissatisfied with the level of support the Truancy Service has provided. It appears that Roger considers supervision and checking in with a manager of some sort an integral part of the mentoring process. He would often ring the mentoring manager or a truancy officer for advice and reassurance about his actions. For example in one instance he did not meet with Caleb for one week because of Caleb’s particularly inappropriate behaviour during their meeting. Roger rang the truancy officer to check if this course of action was approved by the Truancy Service.

Although Roger did not state this, it may be possible that one of the ways Roger continues to have the energy to be involved is through contact with other people where he can discuss his approach or seek advice. It may also be that in this space Roger receives some intrinsic reward in the form of positive comments for what he is doing with his mentee. He reported finding it beneficial to talk with other people about the kinds of activities they did with their students and to share ideas about those that worked and those that did not.
He currently mentors a second child through a different organization, and one of the contractual obligations he ensured for himself was regular supervision. He states that he sometimes uses this time to talk about Caleb as well because it is provided through the new GSES (Group Special Education Services) which Caleb has a link with. However, he also stated that it is no longer as important for him to have supervision about Caleb because he is not having problems with Caleb’s behaviour as much anymore.

The broken link with the Truancy Service was not restored which meant the relationship between Roger and Caleb now operates independently of the Truancy Service.

_Caleb’s Behaviour_

One of the salient features of Roger’s talk about mentoring Caleb is his focus on Caleb’s behaviour. In fact he used the word ‘behavior’ and derivatives of it over twenty times in our hour long interview. Early on in the relationship Roger rang Caleb’s school to find out more information about Caleb’s referral to the Truancy Service as he had limited information from the Truancy Service itself. It was discovered that truancy was only a small part of Caleb’s overall behaviour difficulties.

“I wasn’t aware at the time why the truancy service was called so I rang the school to see why the truancy service was called and found out the whole details of his misbehaviour. The truancy was one small part of his misbehaviour.”

It seems from the beginning of the relationship one of the roles Roger saw for himself was to effect change in Caleb’s behaviour.

“At the start because when I first met Caleb he had no boundaries and hadn’t been taught how to behave basically so that was one of the things I had to do early on and he did misbehave for a start.”

Roger’s talk show that there were a number of ways Caleb behaved that Roger felt he needed to influence. These included; not following instructions, compulsive behaviour, rage attacks, misbehaving in the car and stealing. The following quote outlines Roger’s responses to misbehaviour from Caleb:
“So there were just levels of response towards his misbehaviour. So if he misbehaved slightly I would express disapproval all the way up to when things were bad which happened a couple of times and I would just turn around and go home and inform his mum what he had done wrong and on one occasion when he was really bad I took him home and told him we were not going out next week. He never misbehaved like that again. So the non contact was a very good punishment.”

As well as this Roger stated that he made a decision never to yell at Caleb, because Roger believed enough of that occurred at home. He instead tried to talk calmly with Caleb as his first response.

Alongside the activities and talking they did together (which will be elaborated later) it appears that Roger’s self-defined role as a behaviour modifier has brought changes in Caleb’s behaviour to their relationship. Caleb is calmer and displays much less acting out of behaviour:

“He was compulsive, violent and he basically knows how to behave now. Before that even if I took him to a shipping mall was a nightmare. Now you can take him to the shipping mall and you can trust him whereas you had to keep an eye on him all the time.”

“But some of the activities with Caleb I have not done because I didn’t think he could obey instructions enough but now I can do them.”

“...he hasn’t had one of these attacks (rage attack) for a very long time, in fact probably for about 8 months or something like that. He’s quite settled most of the time.”

Caleb himself also considers that he has made changes in his behaviour. He thought that Roger may have thought of him as a “jerk” when they first met, but wouldn’t any more Caleb also stated:

“I had a bad attitude but now I’ve calmed down. I used to get mad easily but now I don’t.”
He considers this has been influenced by an anger management course Roger supported him into.

One of the more striking components of Roger’s approach to Caleb’s behaviour was that he did not include Caleb as an active participant in the change process. They generally did not come up with these behavioural change goals together, (although there is one example of a situation where they did which I will elaborate), and Roger did not inform Caleb of the boundaries he was setting for his behaviour or of his contact with other parties who were also interested in Caleb’s situation:

“...there’s a whole layer of stuff going on behind the scenes with his family and Special Education and school and things like that. He’s unaware that I’m involved with that and he’s unaware that I talk once a week with Special Education about what is happening”

“I just worked away so that he actually had some firm guidelines of what was expected of him.”

While Roger was focused on improving Caleb’s behaviour and reducing his stealing he did not include Caleb in discussion of these aims.

As shown by Caleb’s admission and Roger’s examples of change, the approach taken by Roger seems to have had some positive impacts for Caleb, especially with regard to the interactions between Roger and Caleb. It seems that while Roger priorities Caleb’s behaviour, he did it in the context of activities which Caleb enjoyed.

Quality Mentoring

From the conversations I had with Roger both formally in the interview situation and informally during the afternoon I spent with them, Roger indicated that he has defined a construct for himself of what ‘quality mentoring’ is. The basis for his construct is activities, and that the nature of these activities create a space where talking is possible and self-esteem and self-confidence is built up. Some of the activities Roger highlights as successful include mountain biking, swimming, fishing and tramping. All these activities are also ones that Caleb enjoys and engages with. It also seems that these are activities where Caleb displays
appropriate behaviour. Roger also mentioned he took Caleb to mini-golf and rock climbing but Caleb was unable to follow instructions and caused some disruption at both places which meant Roger has refrained from taking Caleb there again, despite Caleb also enjoying these activities. Roger did indicate in the interview however that because Caleb has increasingly improved his ability to follow instructions and remain calm that it is possible Roger may try these activities again.

It appears that Roger tries to find activities that keep Caleb interested. For example one of the first times they met they went fishing off the pier but Caleb quickly became disinterested. Roger then suggested they went for a walk along the beach which again did not engage Caleb, so finally they went for a drive over the Port Hills which was more interesting for Caleb.

While Roger tries to cater for Caleb’s interests he also includes the opportunity to talk within the activity as giving it quality. This seems to have had the effect of creating a difference in Roger’s mind between spending time with Caleb and mentoring him. For example, Roger does not consider going to ‘Time Out’ (a video game arcade) an activity that is quality mentoring because he cannot talk with Caleb in this space. However he still takes Caleb to Time Out (on the condition that he has good behaviour) because it seems to be something Caleb enjoys doing. Roger then differentiates the time spent with Caleb between “quality mentoring time” and general time together. Roger actively facilitates a period of quality mentoring into the often lengthy duration of time they spend together (Roger meets Caleb at least once a week, for up to 4 or 5 hours). Roger believes that his ability to deliver quality mentoring has improved during the time he has met with Caleb:

“I’m more expert at handling stuff and the activities I do are more appropriate to the needs of the child”

It is worth noting that from the observation I did with Roger and Caleb I saw that Roger invest a considerably amount of not only time but also energy into the activities with Caleb. He will often take on the role of a ‘play-mate’ and engage with Caleb on that level. For example when we went to McDonalds Roger jointed Caleb in the play area and spent time chasing and playing with him.

Considering this it is not surprising that Caleb values Roger for “just him”. Caleb also places a strong emphasis on the activities he does with Roger as an important part of the relationship. When I asked Caleb what he enjoyed most about spending time with Roger he replied:
“Him, and where he takes me and what he gives me”

Caleb’s conversation about what they do together indicates they enjoy many activities as well as meals out. There also seems to be a shared approach to what they do:

“Yeah we go out heaps of places. Roger picks sometimes where we go, and so do I”.

This possibly illustrates how Roger incorporates both ‘quality mentoring’ and general time. The day I spent with them it seems the mountain biking was arranged by Roger although it was an activity enjoyed by Caleb, but Caleb chose to go to Time Out. In this instance Caleb was able to ado activities he enjoyed and Roger was able to fee like he did some “quality mentoring”.

Talking compared to activities however, was much less of a feature in Caleb’s conversation with me. Although Roger believes talking is important for Caleb:

“Finding the cause if it [Caleb’s anger] and talking it through with his is all that is needed to help him. He has poor coping mechanisms when things go wrong. He tends to bottle it all up and this comes out as rage…talking about it is all he needs to simmer down.”

As stated earlier he tired to encourage activities that provide a space for Caleb to talk about anything that could be leading to inappropriate behaviour and anger.

Interestingly though, it appears that Caleb has ‘control’ over the extent to which that conversation ‘space’ is utilized. Roger stated that sometimes Caleb chose not to talk or his agitation would increase at which point Roger would stop encouraging the conversation:

“But I would only ask him a little bit each week. And just a wee bit about his dad and he got agitated if we talked about that for too long so about two questions would do.”

While Roger may want to probe at more length, he is unable to because Caleb chooses whether he will respond or he gets agitated. This is interesting because it suggest that
although Roger feels like he organizes activities that meet his idea of “quality mentoring” the actual conversations he has that are of “quality” during this time seems to be minimal.

It suggests that while Roger believes part of his role is to provide Caleb with someone to talk to, and he tries to encourage this by creating a space for it, whether or not talking occurs seems to be in the control of Caleb.

Roger’s motivations for continuing with the relationship are not clear. While Caleb expressed his enjoyment and satisfaction with the relationship, Roger was less articulate about what motivated him to continue from a personal perspective. Roger talked about mentoring as “looking good on the CV”, and this was also his original motivation to become involved. Since then however, his reasons for continuing appear to be based on his perception that it would be difficult for Caleb if he was not around:

“Well with Caleb I can’t stop now. The rejection would be phenomenal.”

Secondly it appears that Roger believes unless he is still supporting Caleb the behaviour changes will not last:

“You can’t give up basically because once you have started it if you stop then everything you have done has bee wasted for a start, and the other thing too is that rejection for Caleb which could make him go off the road.”

While Roger does see the relationship as having some successes he still believes he needs to continue as Caleb’s mentor:

“I feel it’s a success but it’s not finished. That’s the problem. He needs constant mentoring to cope”

These comments appear to suggest that Roger perceives a relationship in which Caleb is dependent on him for support, guidance and the release of built-up pressure.

The School Connection

While Roger and Caleb met through a school connection, there has been a minimal focus on school related issues during the time they have been meeting together, with some exceptions.
Not surprisingly, based on Roger’s other priorities in the relationship, the attention paid to school-based issues was in terms of Caleb’s behaviour at school.

In the earlier stages of the relationship, Roger initiated reasonably frequent contact with the school (a phone call every three weeks). His motive was to know how Caleb had been behaving so he could talk with Caleb and work on this with him, since he had no contact with him at school:

“I ring up the principal and discuss Caleb with him every 3 weeks or so to see what has been going on”

As a result of Roger’s initiative, and Caleb’s misbehaviour, one of the goals they worked on together was an effort to reduce the occurrence of disruptive behaviour at school. This was through the form of a contract between Roger and Caleb in which Caleb needed to display positive incidences of behaviour and reduced disruptive behaviour for five weeks. If he did so successfully, with the teacher’s confirmation, he would receive a mountain bike from Roger. This also highlights the extent to which Roger has become involved with Caleb.

The mountain bike must have been a strong motivator for Caleb, as he completed his end of the contract and became the owner of a bike. This is the only example I am aware of in which the behavioural goals are made explicitly to Caleb, and there is a sense of ownership of these goals by Caleb.

However, despite the positive results throughout the five weeks, Caleb has not appeared to maintain his improved record. Since the time of the contract Roger gives the impression that Caleb’s behaviour has been variable. In fact, some time after the interviews I had with Roger, Caleb was stood down from his school due to a behavioural incident. Roger found the re-emergence of his negative behaviours frustrating:

“I just felt like giving up and it started coming undone again and I was getting annoyed. After the end of the contract the second week into the school [term]...he started to go back to what he was like formerly”
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Summary

One of the most striking things about Roger’s description of their relationship is the way he continually emphasizes the behavioural aspect of his role with Caleb. It seems that his experience has been constructed through his identification with a “behaviour-modifier” role. The role he describes seems to be authoritative in nature and more like a parent or a teacher than a support or guide. However, Roger also tries to do activities with Caleb that promote his self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as give him the opportunity to talk through any built-up angry feelings he has. The way he does this seems to be by becoming almost like a ‘play-mate’ of Caleb’s and they relate on a level that is more like friendship. The way Caleb appears to conceptualise the experience indicates that Roger is someone he likes and enjoys spending time with, and not an authority figure. Despite the description of the role Roger privileged in the interview conversation, the role he takes on when he is with Caleb seems to be less authoritative and more like fun and entertainment.
4.5 Krista (mentor) and Dylan (mentee) – their story

“I remember one occasion when Dylan came back from the rugby and you could pick Krista and Dylan out as they were coming down the street with the crowd and those two stood out for no reason other than they were just Krista and Dylan. They were humming eh. They were happy.”

Reflection from Dylan’s mother and partner

This quote seemed to be an accurate summary of the interactions between Krista and Dylan. As will be developed in their story Krista and Dylan had a shared sense of meaning in the relationship which led to mutual satisfaction and enjoyment from engaging with each other. A full description of the factors that seemed to impact on how the relationship was experienced is provided in this section.

Krista’s Educational History

Krista left school at 15, after just starting the fifth form. She has a learning difficulty that affects her memory, which meant she found schoolwork difficult to understand, and consequently did very little at school. Krista thinks she was probably considered a truant when she was at school because she did miss school purposefully on occasion. After leaving school she spent some time in alternative learning environments, for example various TOPS courses and recreation and hospitality courses. It was only three years ago that she began working, after spending six years in alternative learning situations.

Krista found that the various courses she did were different from school in that people were more supportive of each other and helped each other out. She cited that even those students who were taking drugs were given support until they left the course, at which point there was nothing anyone could do. She valued the lifeskills part of the course highly where they learned about things like cooking, CV preparation, first aid, team building, and confidence boosting. She felt that this had been meaningful learning.

She mentioned that she does regret leaving school so early, but also asks the question “what would the point have been of me being there because what would I have got out of it?”
However she is also really encouraging of her younger twin brothers staying interested in school even though they don’t like school at the moment.

She has also been to polytech and completed some modules there, but it took her two attempts to do it. The first time she did not finish as she found it too hard, but when she went back she pushed herself more. Felt she had more confidence to do it and wanted the qualification. She still has some more to do but can go back if she wants to. Krista would like to go to university, but at this stage it is in the too hard and not possible basket, but it is one of her goals.

*Dylan’s family background and DTS involvement*

Dylan has two older sisters and one younger brother. His mother and father are divorced. His dad has remarried and lives in Amberly, but Dylan sees his father regularly. His mother had a partner at the time of the interview who has been with her for approximately two years. One of Dylan’s sisters had been involved with the mentoring program prior to his participation. This was how Dylan became involved in the first instance. He had not gone to school on a few occasions, even at the request of his mother. Her response to this was to ring the mentoring manager at the time, who had set up her daughter’s mentor, for some help. At this point Dylan remembers he went back to school smartly as he did not want to be caught by the truancy officer. In this case Dylan did not even meet a truancy officer, but went straight to having a mentor. He recalls that his mother asked him if he wanted a mentor and at first he wasn’t sure, but then decided he would, although he was not really sure why he changed his mind.

In the interview with his mother she openly discussed her anger issues. She has in the past been in a position where she has punched holes in walls and scratched herself as a way of expressing the anger she is feeling inside. She recalled that in her childhood her father was violent towards her and her siblings, and while she also has had violent outbursts in the past she has never hurt her children. During the time that Dylan was being mentored his mother also began making changes to the way she parented. She had made a conscious choice to be a better parent to her children and consequently was involved with some courses to help her facilitate this process. Interestingly in the interview I had with Dylan he talked about the changes he has also undergone in the time he was with Krista and suggested that it was both Krista and his mother who have helped him make changes.
Krista’s Past Volunteering Experience

Krista’s first volunteering experience was with a Salvation Army Deserving Kids camp. It was some time after being involved with that that she became involved with the DTS. Her involvement began with a perusal of volunteering options at the Volunteer Centre in Christchurch. This is where she found an advert for becoming a patrolling officer for the DTS. She had a concern for young people at risk so took the opportunity to “make a difference” to these young people in this capacity. At this time Krista was helping her mother with a cleaning job but was not working full time which enabled her to take on a demanding role with the truancy service.

Her role as a patrolling officer was literally ‘patrolling’ the streets, parks and malls looking for students who were meant to be at school. She worked alongside the truancy officers in this capacity every day for a number of months. Her experience in this role appears to have been influential in shaping her understanding of truancy and students who are labelled truant. While she was patrolling she would often spend time talking and chatting with the students. Through this Krista developed a diverse perspective of truancy. She learned first hand from truant students about who they were and why they were missing school. Her personal school experience of truanting could also have contributed to her current perspective because her reasons for missing school were not from an opposition to school. Krista is sensitive to the diversity that a term like “truancy” or “truant” has attached to it. She began her experience as a mentor with the view that truancy, can be, although not always, symptomatic of deeper causes.

“I mean a lot of people think truants are students that are bunking from school that are really bad arses. They get into trouble, they do this, they do that, they steal cars, get into fights, they do drugs and all that. Yeah, some of them, but there's also some that have family problem, been bullied at school and nobody, there's some that are depressed and just can't cope with life. But I just think it's a whole range of things. So that just you know, getting bullied at school, or some of them might be really stressed because something's happening at home. And there are some that go out there and they’re stealing and drinking and stuff like that as well but they've also got issues themselves. They've all got issues.”
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The experiences she had while patrolling eventually led to dissatisfaction for a variety of reasons. In this role she found that she was often talking to the same students most of the time. This was a part of the job she liked and highlights that most students were receptive to talking with her because many of them had a lot to say and did want to talk to someone. Because it was often the same students though, it became frustrating for Krista as it felt like patrolling was not making a difference. She felt there was more that could be done for the students and yet the role of a patrolling officer limited what she was able to do.

It was while she was still patrolling that the then mentoring manager approached Krista to engage her into the mentoring program. Krista’s growing dissatisfaction with patrolling and the way she initially conceptualised the role of a mentor meant that this seemed like an opportunity that would fit better with the direction she wanted to take when helping young people.

In the role of a mentor, she saw more opportunity for working closely with a student. When I asked her what appealed about mentoring in the beginning, this was her response:

“Just the fact that it’s one to one and you’re trying to work with them with their issues, their goals and also having fun at the same time.”

Krista’s desire to help

Underlying the context of Krista’s arrival to the mentoring experience seems to be an implicit desire to help students who are having difficulties in some way. As the quote above indicates, the nature of helping is to work alongside students with the issues and goals they identify. Her notion of helping does not appear to explicitly address school absenteeism or educational achievement. It appears that for Krista helping was an important foundation for her understanding of mentoring, but significantly, her diverse perspective of truancy seems to have influenced the way she viewed helping. Krista kept open the possibilities for what she what she would be able to help Dylan with.

In the relationship with Dylan it transpired that the issue of truancy was of minor concern. What was identified was Dylan’s tendency towards violent and angry behaviour both at school and at home:
“He wasn’t actually truanting from school. At the time that I started with him. It was the fact that he was being quite violent at school. And beating children up and stuff like that so. Yeah he had quite a bad anger problem. So that was his main goal was his anger. At school and at home.”

The significance of a helping ethos was also revealed in Krista’s descriptions of moments when she felt a real sense of satisfaction in her role, and also the moments when she found it difficult. Those moments were often tied to how much help she felt she was able to give Dylan. They also provide further confirmation that helping in some capacity was an important part of the role of a mentor as Krista conceptualised it:

“Just the fact that I have helped Dylan. Yeah just the fact that I’ve helped him. I’ve been there for him and I’ve seen his progress. And that makes me feel good because I can see that I have. I’ve put quite a lot of input into it, into his goal setting in his life, and that I can help people. Yeah but it takes time.”

“When he’s sort of was he knew he’d done wrong but he sort of would block it out. He wouldn’t talk and stuff like that. I mean I find that hard for myself ‘cause I was there to try and help him.”

The helping role that Krista played in the relationship was varied in terms of what she did with Dylan. She provided advice, was someone to talk to, someone to do fun adventures with, she monitored progress on his goals, she was occasionally rung in acute situations (when Dylan had come home and his mum was not around to cook them any tea for example), and sometimes she was just there in whatever capacity she could be. From this list it appears like there are two ‘types’ of helping initiatives that are occurring. Firstly, the kind of help Krista initiated that Dylan responded positively to, for example monitoring his goals, and encouraging him to talk about his issues. Secondly, the kind of help that Krista responded to at Dylan’s initiative, for example the acute situations when Dylan called on her.

Because Dylan usually responded positively to the help she was offering, Krista felt a sense of satisfaction in her role, and the way she had conceptualised the role of a mentor was strengthened. Rather than needing to accommodate a new way of thinking about how she would act in the role Dylan’s response to her initiatives confirmed her approach. However it
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was not this ideal all of the time, it was in the more difficult circumstances that Krista’s response to Dylan appears to have been a significant feature of their relationship.

Krista’s Commitment to Persistence

The moments that Krista felt blocked out by Dylan, and the moments when the situation meant she was unable to do anything to help were often times when Krista found mentoring most difficult. Salient though, throughout the conversation I had with Krista, was her steadfast commitment to persist as Dylan’s mentor despite these feelings. Krista persistently chose to stay involved in whatever capacity she could which in these circumstances was sometimes simply being there.

“And even in the bad times I mean that’s okay I mean I still stuck around still. I just didn’t take off or anything like that. But it was hard for me to try and get through to him when he’s not talking.”

“Sometimes I’ve been quite upset at the house and stuff. And I felt I really couldn’t help and it was really hard. And you could sort of see that he was crying out for help but I was there to help him, to be there for him and that, but there was nothing physically I could do.”

There were some concerns Krista had at the beginning of the relationship that gave her some self doubts and uncertainty about whether it would work.

“I know when I first, like the first few sessions I thought, “This is not going to work.” I was thinking to myself you know he may not like me. Yeah I was thinking I don’t know if he wants somebody else. ‘Cause I just thought. I was thinking to myself, “Does he want a male.” That was one thing that was in my head. ‘Cause the mother said something about a male not a female. And but yeah he didn’t want a male. It was fine with him to have a female. But things take time as well and sometimes time is stressful because you’re thinking, “Is this going to work?” Sometimes it does and that’s cool. And you’ve got to take it slowly too. You know, you don’t want to feel like you’ve been rejected yourself.”
Often on the occasions when it was difficult self-doubts would reoccur. Again though, despite these kind of feelings sometimes being present for Krista, her commitment to continue meeting with Dylan and finding ways to help him was more important. It appears that Krista had a belief in what she was doing that helped her to maintain her commitment even when she faced self-doubt.

Interestingly, one of Dylan’s concerns before he began the experience was that Krista was not a male. He had hoped for a male, and was uncertain about what it would be like to have a female. He had some preconceived ideas about the kinds of activities he may end up doing with a female. However he was surprised by the difference in practice to what he had imagined.

“I thought we were going to go shopping and go to the girls shops. We actually did all these guy things like we went to go-carts. We went to dirt carts and not many girls I know do that.”

It is also possible that because Dylan was responding so positively to Krista’s initiatives that she was receiving some intrinsic rewards from Dylan. For example, he began talking more after the first month, and he began to achieve goals he was working. Krista acknowledges that she felt a sense of satisfaction from the se things. Therefore it seems likely that because there was a positive response from Dylan, it became more rewarding for Krista which helped her to remain committed to the relationship.

**Sensitivity to Dylan’s needs**

Another feature of Krista’s approach to mentoring was the sensitivity she had to Dylan’s needs. Her perspective towards getting to know Dylan shows her sensitivity and awareness of allowing time to enable Dylan to trust her:

“It did take Dylan a month to sort of try and start talking to me. Because there was sort of that trust. It’s like that with a lot of people. You’ve got to get to know them before you can trust them.”

Her response in the situations when it was more difficult or she was left feeling helpless, also revealed the sensitivity with which she approached her role as a mentor. She would often step
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back a little from her desire to help him in the ways she envisaged, and instead gave Dylan the opportunity to have his needs met in ways that he decided. Her sensitivity to his needs continues to highlight her commitment to the relationship at the same time.

“And even in the bad times I mean that's okay I mean I still stuck around still. I just didn't take off or anything like that. But it was hard for me to try and get through to him when he's not talking. 'Cause I sort of found myself that, oh I'm not doing anything, I'm not helping. You know so what's the point of me being here. But I mean that was like, you know, it could happen one week the next week he was fine. But that's okay as long as I'm still there 'cause that's how I think after I've thought about it. He doesn't have to talk. I mean he's working on his goals yeah. But it's okay for one week out of a month that he doesn't have to talk. I mean maybe he just wants that. He wants to be taken away and just go for a drive or just a walk. Without any questions and all that. I mean gee.”

Krista approached the mentoring relationship with realism about the kind of changes to expect from Dylan. She was constantly accentuating the positive changes he made while minimising any negative behaviour that happened:

“He has times at school you know he may get angry but he’s sort of coping with it different. I mean every child has their fights and stuff like that. You can't be perfect. I told him that, “You can't be perfect. And if something happens you just got to try again.””

Krista was also sensitive to Dylan’s age and gender. She has twin brothers that were just a little younger than Dylan, this may have provided her with some understanding of the needs of young children. She was aware that the helping role she envisaged, which was originally conceptualised as goal setting, needed to be balanced with having good times together too:

“Cause I was working with a 10-year-old boy you see. Or nine to start off with. I sort of had to make it fun as well as, yeah. Serious stuff as well at the same time.”
As an earlier quote indicated, Krista was adept at finding activities that were received positively by Dylan. These included dirt car racing, going to the basket ball and rugby, and playing mini-golf and pool.

The sensitivity with which she acted towards Dylan’s needs also emphasises the balance she sought between having fun with Dylan while ensuring she talked with him about his issues and helped him work on his goals. There are a number of comments from Krista that espouse this perspective. Clear from these is her belief that these two components are both significant elements of a successful mentoring relationship. Consequently, the role she often took in the relationship was to ensure that both elements occurred:

“At times I thought he wanted to go out and have fun. And spend money. But there was quite a few times I’d have to push him to sort of just talk about what’s going on and his goals instead of let’s go out and have fun and do all these things with the money and that. ‘Cause he was a 9-year-old child of course he wants to go out and have fun and all that. But eventually everything levelled out. Just sort of levelled out.”

Explicit goals

Working with Dylan’s issues and goals was a way that Krista, in her role as a mentor, had envisaged being able to help him. Goal setting was one of the pieces of advice that Krista received from the mentor training day that she highlighted in our conversation. Talking about goal setting, working on goals, and achieving goals was a theme throughout the interviews with both Krista and Dylan. It was evident that their relationship had a strong goal focus and became an integral part of their interactions together. Krista purposefully facilitated the focus on goals, however it seemed to work because Dylan had a very positive response to this type of intervention.

It is interesting to note however that the way she approached goal related activity with Dylan seems to be influenced by both the explicit advice she received from the DTS, in the sense of including it as part of their relationship, and also by the implicit ideas she had about students who are truant. She did not encourage Dylan to develop goals about school attendance or achievement necessarily. Her sensitivity towards acknowledging students may have deeper issues of their own enabled Dylan to have the space to surface what was important for him to
work on. The goals that he worked on were ones that he chose for himself, which may have also contributed to a sense of ownership to them and a stronger desire to achieve them.

“We used to come up with them together, for me, we used to sit and think of some goals which took up an hour or something like that. Yeah about an hour or two hours every Tuesday … One was to not get into a fight for at least a month and that was my main one because I used to get angry and punch holes in walls … in the end I achieved all of them but my main one was to handle my anger better.”

Krista intentionally encouraged Dylan to set his own agenda. This was in terms of the goals he wanted to achieve, and how he would go about achieving them. Krista did offer her advice, suggestions, and encouragement continuously, but the focus remained on Dylan developing his own ideas, or finding ways of being less angry so he could act the way he knew he wanted to.

“Cause he actually told me his goals and then I’d sit down with him and, say “What do you think you could do to change what you’re doing at the moment?” And he’d have some suggestions”

“Yeah, he knew what to do. He basically knew what to do. But once he gets so angry he couldn’t - he just wouldn’t think about that in his head. He couldn’t get through that bit. All he wanted to do was hit and hit and he couldn’t understand why another child could hit him but he couldn’t hit back. And I just sort of just said, “Look if you don’t hit back, you know, you’re better for that. You know, you should be proud of yourself. If you don’t hit back you’ll feel so much better.” You know. It was just little small steps and, yeah it was, yeah. He did really well so I think he knew what he wanted.

Because Dylan worked on his goals and did achieve them, her desire to help was fulfilled and she was provided with feelings of success in her role. Helping Dylan to continue making progress then became one of her motivations for remaining in the relationship. Dylan’s success provided her with the knowledge that she was able to help the student she was working with in some tangible way, which was one of her reasons for leaving the patrolling
aspect of the DTS and becoming involved with mentoring. It meant she was able to feel that she was making a difference, which gave her a sense of purpose for the role she had:

“What was the magic about it? Just the fact that I’d helped someone achieve their goals. Their dreams come true basically.”

Often Krista was monitoring Dylan’s progress as well as encouraging him to keep working at his goals. Krista also linked the activities they did together to Dylan’s goal related achievement. Although she did not introduce this principle until they had been meeting for six months or so when they had become closer and trusted each other. This choice again reflects the kind of balance Krista had prioritised in their relationship, as well as the sensitivity with which she acted in doing so.

“Yeah and if he’d done [a goal he had set] this is what he’d get. We sort of did it that way. There was times that he didn’t do it [his goal] and we didn’t do that [the activity]. We just did something else, a walk or just a drive... that wasn’t brought in till after half a year.”

Krista’s approach to working on goals in their relationship seems to have had a positive impact on Dylan. However, again Dylan’s response is one of the key factors about the way the relationship works. He responded with willingness to come up with goals, follow through with them, take responsibility for consequences when his behaviour was not appropriate (although I hasten to add, my impression from both Krista and Dylan is that this did not occur often), and have Krista monitor his progress with him.

“I used to forget about them [my goals] and she would say how are you going on your goals and I would go oh yeah. Because I would do real good on my goals ... [it was] good just to know I was achieving them. It’s good to feel you are achieving your goals”

It is as if the experience of someone focusing solely on him was enough to prompt participation in the ideas Krista had, and then the experience of success became rewarding and motivating. This is one possible way of looking at Dylan’s response to the type of mentor Krista chose to be.
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Accentuating the Positive

Consistent throughout the conversation with Krista was her unending positive regard for Dylan and his achievements.

“And I told him “Look I’m really proud of you. I’ve had so much good news about you at school. That is really great.” And then I’d ask him, “Do you feel proud of yourself? Do you feel good?” you know. And he goes, “Yeah I think I do, eh.” And the self-esteem sort of went up and you could just see it”

“He’s a really cool kid. He really cares about other people too.”

“Yeah but he did really well with his goals but slowly. Talked about things, how to deal with them. Like at school going to a teacher and talking to somebody telling them what’s happened? Those kind of ways instead of letting it just blow and just hurting somebody.”

Running throughout the interview was also the positive regard she had for the relationship itself. This has been highlighted by her persistence to it and her commitment when it was more difficult. She continually remains focused on the positive aspects.

Talking, talking, talking

One of the striking features of the interview I had with Dylan was the way he privileged talking as one of the most important features of a mentoring relationship. His response to the question what do you think might have made an impact on the changes he has noticed in himself was:

“Just the one on one talking mainly”

Again, when I asked him if there was anything else he was doing to manage his anger his response remained:

“Just the talking would do it mainly”
Krista was the person Dylan reports talking to about his anger issues. He did not talk with his mother at the stage he was doing most of his work on his anger goals. Although it seems from Karen’s interview that Dylan is more open now and spends time talking with her. She also acknowledges when he was involved in the relationship with Krista there were often things they would talk about when she was not part of the conversation and that remained between Dylan and Krista.

Dylan believes that all the talking he did with Krista contributed a lot to the changes he noticed in himself with regard to his behaviour and the goals he was able to achieve. It seems that talking was a mechanism by which Dylan was able to accomplish his goals and aims. This would indicate the kind of talking they did became particularly significant for Dylan.

Talking was a prominent part of their relationship from the very beginning. Dylan remembers that when they first began meeting they spent some time learning about each other, and this was again through conversation. Dylan felt that he knew Krista quite well after a few weeks because they would often go for drives and spend time talking. One of the things he highlighted was that it was important to know each other quite well before he could really enjoy the activities they did together:

“It took more than a term to actually know each other well enough for going out places and things like that.”

What makes this finding even more pertinent is that Dylan does not consider himself very open, or prepared to talk about himself. At least, that was how he began the relationship. By the end of his time with Krista he feels he was much more open. This change came about because they knew each other more. While Dylan does not verbalise this change as the development of trust, it looks as though through learning about each other trust occurred which enabled Dylan to give more of himself to the relationship.

The importance Dylan placed on talking was revealed in the advice he would give mentors at the start of a relationship:

“Just talk to the person mainly. Give them some goals to at least like work for.”

Then again, when getting to know a student he suggests:
“Just sit down and talk about it. Talk about their hobbies and interests and all that.”

It seems that both Krista and Dylan valued talking in their relationship. There are indications from Krista that talking was important to her from the beginning, and it seems likely that talking became something that was valued by Dylan after it became meaningful for him in the context of the relationship. This would indicate that there was ‘something’ between Krista and Dylan that opened up a space for communication that they both responded to. It seems that the talking that Krista and Dylan did together provided them with shared meanings about the purpose of the relationship and common goals to work on.

**Krista’s connection to the DTS mentoring program**

One of the features of supervision that Krista appreciated was working through some of the more complex family issues she considered difficult. She found it was helpful to be able to talk about these issues. She also acknowledged that ‘becoming too close’ was a tendency she had in her approach to mentoring. Supervision was a way for her to work through some ways of maintaining some between herself and Dylan, as well as the family.

Krista made active use of the supervision that was offered during the time she was mentoring. She appreciated being able to share her stories about her relationship with Dylan as well as listen to others stories too. She felt it was a good way to share ideas and advice about difficulties or activities or issues that were pertinent. She also enjoyed the social aspect of getting together with others and “having a chat’ about their experiences.

“Yeah it was good. Got to know some people who was some my age there, some a bit younger, some a bit older you know. Really good to hear other people’s stories, how they're getting on, people give each other (maybe) advice on how they've done things. With their student, you know. Yeah no it's really helpful.”

She also recalled that it was at supervision she would hear of Dylan’s progress at school. Sometimes the supervisor would have information that he was able to pass on to her. Possibly because it provided her with some rewards for her involvement was another reason why she felt supervision was a good process. This may have also contributed to her persistence in the
relationship, because she was receiving intrinsically rewarding information, it meant that she perhaps had more motivation to continue meeting with Dylan, even when it was sometimes difficult.

**Summary**

One of the striking findings through the conversations between Krista and Dylan was that they both emphasised the importance of the same features in the relationship. These included, talking together, working on goals, taking time to get to know each other, and having fun. It is difficult to comment if both Krista and Dylan had these values before they began the experience, but whether or not this is the case it seems that participation in the experience has drawn them both to these conclusions. This suggests that they both entered the relationship with flexibility to let it develop by its own course. There are other hints from Krista’s conversation that she began with some ways of understanding the role of a mentor. These mostly seem to have been strengthened, often because of the way Dylan has responded. However Krista’s sensitivity to his responses illuminate that she was able to be flexible in her approach. It is possible that the kind of way she conceptualised the role was open to change from the beginning, but the particular situation she was in did not warrant it. Neither began the relationship with specific expectations about the outcome, especially in terms of school attendance or educational achievement. This left room for the development of their own goals and aims which seems to have provided them with a good foundation from which to be in relationship.
Chapter 5  FINDINGS

Stories from the participants in the last section raise some interesting and provocative issues for the field of mentoring. I have drawn out a number of issues that I think have contributed to the sense of meaning that mentors and mentees have taken from their experience. These include the operation of the District Truancy Service (DTS), the expectations that mentors brought with them, what the mentees appreciated about the relationships, and the degree of mutual satisfaction between mentors and mentees plus potential reasons for this and the issue of truancy.

I also acknowledge that there are likely to be a number of other important issues that deserve attention and discussion. However, I found it necessary to contain the scope of this study to those areas central to my interest. I hope future work may address other concerns that may have been raised by these stories.

5.1 The operation of the DTS

There were two issues in particular that were raised from the way the programme was set up that seem to have contributed to the experiences of the mentors and mentees. These were the programme structure and the implicit positioning of mentors and mentees in the programme.
5.1.1 The programme structure

The DTS programme did not appear to operate from any particular model or structure. Whether it was originally set up from a particular model was not clear, but the way in which the mentoring manager at the time ran the programme did not seem to reflect a model or even a set of “best practice” principles.

What the DTS programme did seem to do was combine two of the more common approaches to mentoring; firstly, to be a friend to the young person, and secondly to work towards achieving the specific goals of the programme through that friendship. There was an expectation of both building a friendship and developing goals such as returning to school consistently, but there was little connection made between these two concepts and how in practice they could fit together in a programme that had specific aims. It is apparent from the reports of the mentors that these two aims are somewhat conflicting in this programme.

The advice the mentors received from the DTS to “be a friend” to the mentees caused some confusion for the mentors because the relationships they developed with their mentees did not directly impact on truancy. The DTS suggested being a friend was a mechanism through which mentors could influence their mentees. This implied that the objective of reducing truancy was the primary goal and offering friendship was one way mentors could achieve this. In practice however this did not occur because truancy was often symptomatic of other issues which extended beyond the influence of the mentor. This meant that “being friends” did not achieve the intended goal. It seems that the way the programme combined these two things contributed to a lack of clear understanding for mentors about their role.

5.1.2 Implicit factors contributing to the positioning of mentors and mentees

There were a number of implicit assumptions expressed by the mentoring manager that I think contributed a subtle, although unintentional, view that positioned mentees from a deficit orientation. This was despite the external appearance that the mentees were the central focus of the programme.
(i) The descriptors the mentoring manager used to describe the mentees

Mentees and their families were described by the mentoring manager as generally coming from solo parent families with a transient or missing father figure, often in other kinds of trouble with the police, young people who reacted negatively to authority figures and who did not value education. All of these characteristics were considered problematic by the mentoring manager because it meant these students would be less likely to contribute in the labour market at a later date. The view he held of the young people meant that they were positioned as needing assistance to go back to school and develop a value for education. While this assumption in itself could be considered accurate in some instances, because it occurred alongside a number of other ways the mentoring manager thought about and interacted with these young people it contributed as a whole to a deficit way of thinking about them. It also assumes that people who have certain backgrounds, like solo-parenting, will have certain outcomes, like difficulty with school and this is not always the case.

(ii) The initial meeting between the mentoring manager and the mentee

The mentoring manager gave all of the mentees and their parents a one-on-one visit to ensure the mentees knew their responsibilities. In this initial visit he outlined the responsibilities the mentees had to their mentors in terms of respecting and valuing the mentor’s time. At this meeting the purpose of the programme was defined for them and they were not able to make any contribution concerning why they might enjoy having a mentor or how it could be beneficial to them. The mentoring manager was seeking commitment from the mentee and their caregiver that the terms and conditions of their mentoring arrangement were understood. He considered that it was important to be authoritative to ensure he received the commitment he was looking for. This positioned the mentees (and their caregivers to a certain extent) as people who needed to be treated with authority and direction as opposed to flexibility and collaboration. Mentees were also positioned as passive recipients of the intervention they needed to become more successful. Their responsibilities were explained in terms of respecting and valuing the mentor’s time, and not in terms of how they might best gain from the mentoring relationship. I was struck by how silent the mentees were rendered in this initial process, despite the meaningful intentions of the mentoring manager to provide what he believed could be a positive intervention for the young person.
(iii) The mentoring manager’s view of the mentors

The mentoring manager clearly held the mentors in high regard. They were positioned as people going out of their way to help the young people become more enthusiastic about school. The mentoring manager saw it as his role to ensure that the mentors were supported and he made himself available to them at any time. The instructions he gave to the mentees on his initial visits were also in keeping with looking after the mentors. It seems that the responsibilities of the mentor were left open with a broad expectation of improving the young person’s school attendance and instilling in them a desire for education. There was very little advice about how to achieve these goals beyond encouraging a friendship that began to initiate a goal setting process. There is a strong contrast of authority compared to flexibility in the way mentees and mentors were treated by the mentoring manager.

The flexibility with which the mentoring manager dealt with the mentors compared to the authority he used with the mentees contributed to the notion of needing to intervene for the young person. I was also struck by how the mentors were considered to have appropriate skills to relate to these young people and achieve the goals of the programme, even with marginal training and advice. This in itself seems to be an assumption that could leave the mentors under-prepared for relating to young people in developmental ways and dealing with complex issues like truancy.

(iv) Support

The mentees had no mediator or support person within the programme setting. The mentoring manager made it clear that he was there first and foremost to support the mentors but that if the families or the mentees had a problem they could also contact him. He did make a point of checking in with families at least once during the programme, which the caregivers I spoke to appreciated. However the mentees could only go to their caregivers if there was ever a problem even though in the cases of these young people they sometimes had a difficult relationship with primary caregivers. In my view, this did not provide mentees with an avenue for support if a situation with their mentor arises and they need it. In the Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) programme both the mentors and mentees are supported by a coordinator who oversees their relationship and does not favour supporting the mentor (Grossman and Tierney, 1998). The lack of structured support in the DTS programme further indicates the positioning
of the mentees as being receivers of an intervention and it is another way that they are rendered silent in the process.

(v) Training

There was a noticeable absence of the perspective of the mentee in training. Mentees were characterised for mentors in terms of their home backgrounds and the characteristics of students who are most often truant, for example that they are likely to be oppositional. Mentors also had an ex-mentor come to speak to them about the role as well as being briefed on some ideas and ways of building relationships. There were no stories from the mentees, or anecdotal conversations about the mentees’ response to the programme. It seems that even in training the voice of the mentee was silent.

(vi) Choice

Mentees had little input into the programme. They did not have a choice about who they would become paired with. While it may be difficult to run a programme which encouraged the mentees’ choice it highlights a significant difference between formalised mentoring programmes and relationships that occur naturally for young people. In natural relationships it is traditionally at the mentees’ initiative that the relationship develops, with a person that the mentee sees as someone who could provide support or possessing skills or knowledge that is of interest to the mentee. It seems to be a relationship that develops over time and is based on mutual reciprocity and commitment to the relationship. An obvious difference between a natural relationship and the relationships formed in this particular programme is the lack of any choice or initiative that the mentee is able to have in the process. The initial meeting between the mentees and the mentoring manager where the mentees were talked to rather than included in the conversation is one example where their choice and initiative was limited.

It was not purposeful that the mentees were positioned in ways that meant they were effectively silent in the process and had little support or means to contribute. It seems to be a consequence of the general assumptions that are made about young people who fall in the ‘at risk’ category. However, at-risk is a useful construct to bring young people to attention who do need extra assistance, unless there is a conscious approach to understanding what ‘at risk’ means it can become a way of categorising young people that inadequately reflects their needs.
Chapter 5

and provides little information about potential strengths, competencies and interests (Tidwell
and Corona Garret, 1994).

5.2 Mentors held initial expectations that influenced their conceptions of the
role of a mentor

The mentors were all aware of the goal of the programme which was to influence the
mentees’ school attendance and encourage an interest and value in education. This
expectation was made clear to the mentors in their training and particularly in their
relationship with the mentoring manager. Because truancy was the reason for the existence of
the programme initially, and reducing truancy was the pretext under which they became
involved, it is not surprising that this was a primary aim of the mentors.

As well as reducing truancy mentors had other expectations and goals that were generally
similar. These broadly reflected hopes of influencing their mentee in some way whether this
was helping the mentee become interested and excited about school, being a role model,
changing attitude and behaviour problems or working on goals the mentee identified.
Although there were these general similarities there were subtle differences in the way these
expectations were expressed. Some mentors seemed to have more flexibility in their
expectations while others seemed to be quite clear about how their expectations defined their
role.

For example, Elizabeth had clear expectations about the kind of student she would be working
with and what her role would be. In comparison Matthew entered into the relationship with
the expectation of learning about his student and had only vague ideas about his role. From
the beginning Krista recognised that truancy was likely to be because of other reasons and so
her focus was particularly related to working through the issues her mentee identified. Roger
had less clear initial expectations but quickly decided Caleb’s behaviour was to be his main
focus.

I also found that the role the mentors defined for themselves initially was influenced by their
personal histories. The relatively minimal training they received about what the role entailed
seems to have meant that the goals of the programme were assimilated into the past
experience of the mentors and this contributed to the way the mentors developed a conception
of their role. For example, Krista’s past experience with the DTS had alerted her to think
about young people who are truant in ways that influenced the expectations she had about being a mentor. Likewise, Elizabeth’s past volunteering experience with oppositional students influenced her expectations about her potential mentee and her role as a mentor.

5.3 What the mentees appreciated about the relationship

The impression from the interviews was not so much of initial expectations from the mentees. This is understandable given the time lapse of over a year in most cases between the beginning of their relationship and when I interviewed them. What the mentees were able to express clearly, however, is what they appreciated from the relationships they were, or continue to be, involved in. Given the way the mentees were positioned, I found it surprising that they in general had a positive view of their experience.

Unlike the mentors, the mentees did not appear to have initial expectations. As Lucas (2001) comments, unless a young person has experienced a relationship like this before, it is likely they do not know what to expect from it. They have to learn what it means to be in this kind of relationship. The comments from the mentees indicate that in the process of engaging in these relationships they were able to articulate what they valued and what was important to them about having a mentor.

In all four cases it came through strongly that the mentees enjoyed and responded to having fun with their mentors. They talked about the places they went with their mentors, the time they spent with them and the activities they engaged in together. The accounts from the mentees suggest that all their mentors were able to create a space that meant they were having fun, which was of high value for the mentees. This meant that all the mentees described the experience as fun and all of them were glad to have been linked to their mentor.

There were also subtleties within the mentees’ responses, however, that alluded in some cases to more than a fun experience. Dylan in particular suggested that the talking he did with Krista in their relationship and working towards achieving goals was as important as having fun. For Dylan it was these aspects that helped him to become a non-violent person capable of handling his anger. The other three did not indicate having the same kind of transformational experience that seemed to have occurred for Dylan, but there were indications of some changes. Zara, for example, suggested that Elizabeth helped her to think about things differently, Caleb indicated that he had made changes in his attitude since he had been
spending time with Roger, and the reciprocity Glen is beginning to show by initiating meetings with Matthew suggests a growth in social skills.

The act of the mentor participating alongside the mentee in fun activities seems to be essential if the mentee is to engage in the relationship. There are also hints from these mentor-mentee pairs that fun could be playing a more significant role than just an entertainment value. Krista and Dylan’s case, and the subtle changes from the other mentees, suggests that fun could perhaps be used more intentionally to create a context for significant developmental gains for the mentee.

There were other things that were not suggested by the mentees themselves but which were consistent across all the relationships that also could have contributed to the positive way the mentees talked about their experience. These were persistency, consistency and commitment.

In all cases the mentors were persistent even when they found it difficult. For example Matthew continued meeting with Glen even when he felt he was not making any difference to his school attending behaviour – in fact it was getting worse. They were all consistent in their genuine efforts to develop a relationship with the young person. For example Elizabeth recorded information Zara told her in a little book so that she would be able to remember details that were important to Zara. Finally they were all committed to following through with the initial decision they made to be a mentor, even if it was out of a sense of obligation or duty rather than because the relationship was rewarding. This finding is consistent with Freedman (1998) who suggests that persistent “showing up” by the mentor is one of the strongest predictors of successful mentoring relationships.

5.4 The degree of mutual understanding between mentors and mentees was different across the pairs

The expectations mentors had of the relationship compared to what the mentees actually enjoyed was quite different so it is not surprising that in few instances mentors and mentees had a similar appreciation of the relationship.

In Elizabeth and Zara’s relationship there was virtually no mutual satisfaction from what occurred. While Zara indicated she enjoyed it and appreciated Elizabeth being ‘friend-like’, Elizabeth felt she was not fulfilling her role. When attempts by Elizabeth to keep education a
focus were seen as unnecessary by Zara, Elizabeth concluded that she could have better mentored a different student who was in more need.

Roger and Caleb also seemed to have little mutual satisfaction from the relationship. While Roger actively pursued activities that Caleb enjoyed he did not articulate that he found this rewarding. Roger acknowledged that Caleb had shown improvement during the time Roger had been his mentor but he remains frustrated that these changes have not been generalised to his school behaviour. He is also frustrated because he believes Caleb needs continual mentoring to cope, and if he was to stop now his efforts would be undone.

Matthew and Glen were able to develop some shared understandings about their relationship that meant Matthew was able to become more satisfied and accepting of his role even though it was not achieving the kind of benefits he first hoped it might. In this relationship there was some degree of mutual satisfaction as Matthew chose to enjoy the same things Glen did from the relationship. However, Matthew did continue to be disappointed that their relationship remained on a shallow level.

In stark contrast to the others, Krista and Dylan were the only pair to express a strongly similar appreciation of their relationship. They both highlighted similar things in their relationship that were important to them, for example, talking, working on goals and having fun together. Krista discussed a high degree of satisfaction from the relationship both because of Dylan’s achievements and because her own sense of self confidence increased from knowing she could help a young person. The relationship was rewarding for them both and they both shared an understanding of their roles and responsibilities within that relationship.

5.4.1 Potential reasons for why mentors and mentees appreciated the relationship differently

The stories of the participants also shed some light on the potential reasons why there were differences in the degree of mutual understanding between mentors and mentees.
(i) The impact of expectations on the mentor’s feelings of satisfaction from the relationship

The degree to which mentors could adjust their expectations as a result of participation in the relationship seems to be related to the degree of mutual understanding and satisfaction felt between each pair. In this study Krista and Dylan, along with Matthew and Glen, seemed to feel more satisfied from the relationship than did Elizabeth and Zara or Roger and Caleb. The accounts from Krista and Matthew suggest that they adjusted their expectations to fit with the relationship they were experiencing in more ways than Elizabeth or Roger.

Elizabeth and Roger had quite clearly defined ideas of their role and what they expected to do as mentors. Elizabeth, for example, envisaged using her past experience to help a student who had an oppositional attitude to school become more enthusiastic and interested. Likewise, early on in the relationship Roger defined his role as impacting on Caleb’s behaviour, so his feelings of satisfaction were dependent on how Caleb behaved both with him and in other situations. In both these cases the expectations of the mentors were not always met but in neither case did Elizabeth or Roger reframe their objectives to take into account how the relationship was progressing.

In contrast, both Krista and Matthew, to different degrees, negotiated how their relationship worked by co-constructing the expectations of the relationship with their mentees. For example, during a period when he was particularly frustrated, Matthew asked Glen to think about what he wanted from the relationship. Through this feedback process Matthew was able to feel more comfortable engaging in fun activities with Glen and it became a significant way he found satisfaction from the relationship. Krista and Dylan also negotiated the purpose of their relationship which meant that the process of goal setting and working on goals was negotiated in terms of the priority it had in the relationship, what the goals were and how these would be monitored. The ongoing experience continued to shape the goals and expectations of both Krista and Dylan. As a result Krista experienced a high degree of satisfaction and a genuine feeling of success.

Both Matthew and Krista developed a greater degree of mutual understanding about the relationship with their mentees than did Elizabeth or Roger and this seems to have been influenced by the degree to which the mentors could adjust their expectations as a result of their participation in the relationship.
**(ii) Mentees; they took what they wanted and left the rest**

Another factor that seems to have impacted on the mixed feelings of success and satisfaction for three of the mentors is that the mentees seemed to have taken what they wanted from the mentors, but left the rest. By this I mean that the comments from Roger, Elizabeth and Matthew indicate they felt they had a number of skills and experiences that they were able and willing to offer their mentee, but these things were not responded to by their mentees. Instead the mentees seemed to ‘take’ the chance at having fun and spending time with the mentor without taking the extras the mentors were offering (e.g. help with homework or having someone to talk with) which the mentors considered of more value.

For example, Roger was prepared to offer Caleb a space in which he could talk to a trusting person who would listen. Roger saw this as one of the most important parts of his interactions with Caleb. However, Caleb appeared to respond more positively to the activities Roger offered than the conversations Roger attempted to facilitate. Ironically the activities themselves and the interactions within them seem to be what was beneficial for Caleb, rather than the more explicit help Roger tried to offer.

In another example, Elizabeth frequently tried to engage Zara in discussions about school oriented topics in her belief that this was the best way she could mentor given the circumstances. However, Zara consistently preferred to discuss movies, boyfriends, her activities with other friends and these kind of topics. Although it was frustrating for Elizabeth, Zara appreciated that Elizabeth was able to relate to her at this level.

Krista and Dylan were an exception to the experiences of the other mentor/mentee pairs. In their case Dylan ‘took’ more of what was on offer. Not only did he value the fun activities he and Krista shared together, he also placed a high value on the talking and goal setting they did. With Krista’s help he identified goals that saw him develop a new understanding of himself as a non-violent person. In this case Krista and Dylan placed the same value on the interactions they shared within the relationship resulting in mutual satisfaction; the only pair to share this.

**(iii) The degree of role clarity felt by mentors**

Both the factors above contributed to the sense of uncertainty about roles that was evident for three of the four mentors. The training from the DTS did not appear to alleviate these
confusions and because little guidance was provided mentors were left to construct the role in their own way. Interestingly, Elizabeth and Roger both determined their role early on and it remained relatively rigid. In contrast, Krista and Matthew had a more flexible approach that included negotiating with their mentee about roles and the purpose of the relationship.

Adding to the uncertainty about roles was the lack of clarity surrounding how adult/adolescent relationships were conceptualised in this programme. While the mentoring manager suggested that mentors would be providing a positive peer influence, the responsibility they had to help reduce truancy is not the role of a peer. McPartland and Nettles (1992) suggests that objectives such as improved school attendance may require adult monitoring and pressure that goes beyond the theoretical role of a mentor. In the case of Krista and Dylan the relationship had strong elements of fun and companionship but there also seemed to be clear boundaries that defined it as mentoring and not a peer relationship. For example, Krista used activities as rewards when Dylan had made progress on his goals (with Dylan’s consultation) rather than just a means to get along with Dylan.

5.5 The issue of truancy

All of the mentors realised that truancy was either non-problematic or symptomatic of other causes. Truancy was not a central issue in Dylan and Krista’s case because the truant behaviour was resolved at the beginning of the mentoring relationship. Other issues were identified by Dylan that Krista supported him with. Roger, Matthew and Elizabeth all recognised that truancy occurred because of reasons other than the young person’s opposition to school. For example, Glen was missing particular classes to avoid becoming angry with some members of the class. Another example is Zara’s chaotic living situation and set of friends which impacted on her choice to remain absent from school. Although these other issues were identified by the mentors, reducing truancy in terms of how they could help the mentee go to school remained a focus of the relationship for them all because of their limited capacity to do anything else.

Because these external circumstances were outside the realm of influence for the mentors it consequently made the aim of reducing truancy difficult to achieve. Three of the mentees and/or their mentors reported that truant behaviour continued in some form even after the relationship had been maintained for some time. It seems apparent that it was particularly
difficult because in this programme there were no relationships formed with the school or other support institutions in the lives of the young people. Mentoring was limited to the relationship between the mentor and mentee. This meant although the mentors discovered reasons for truant behaviour there was little they could do with this information. Implicitly this seems to locate the problem of the truancy within the young person because there was no structure in place to help with the particular issues the mentors were able to identify. One mentor (Elizabeth) suggested that it would have been much more helpful for her to have a connection to Zara’s school and teachers so she could work alongside them to be more aware of Zara’s school attendance and achievement. In another case, Roger contacted the school directly, because he felt isolated from understanding Caleb’s truancy and needed to know from the school’s perspective what had led to this behaviour. The DTS had identified that this was a flaw in the way the programme was operating and was attempting to make some changes in that area, although these did not come into effect before the programme ceased to operate.

Although mentors would continue to try to work on the issue of truancy this was often met with resistance by the mentees. Elizabeth in particular, placed a high value on engaging her mentee in conversations that related to school attendance and achievement and other mentors wanted to discuss other issues that had been identified as problematic for the mentee. For example, Roger’s definition of ‘quality mentoring’ was doing activities in which he could engage Caleb in a conversation. In most cases for the mentees, these kinds of conversations were not valued and were usually blocked or averted when mentors attempted to initiate them. Caleb for example would only comply with Roger’s questioning for a short time before he became agitated. Matthew suggested Glen would often block attempts at conversation that required him to think about issues beyond the activities they were engaged in. Zara also valued talking about general topics such as the movies and her friends and boyfriend with Elizabeth, but she cautioned that mentors should be aware of not pushing the school issue too much if they want to maintain a relationship with their mentee.

Having fun on the other hand was universally engaged in by all of the mentees. The mentors also believed that having fun with their mentee was important. However, this goal had a higher value for the mentees than the mentors. Mentees viewed fun and activities as the most important part of the relationship. Mentors however, viewed the ‘friendship-like’ or fun part of the relationship as a mechanism by which to engage the mentee into conversations that would address problematic issues. The important part of the relationship for the mentors was
influencing change for their mentees while fun was secondary. For example Roger considered that spending time at the games arcade ‘Time Out’ was not quality mentoring because it only provided entertainment for Caleb without any additional ‘helpful’ benefits.
Chapter 6  DISCUSSION

In the following discussion I have chosen to focus on three main issues that I have drawn from the findings. Firstly I offer a critique of the assumptions that underpinned the way the District Truancy Service (DTS) operated the mentoring programme. Secondly, I go on to question what we understand about successful mentoring and how it can be encouraged given the experiences of these pairs in mentoring relationships through the DTS programme. Finally, I consider tentative solutions to the first two issues by drawing the discussion towards an exploration of the usefulness of socio-cultural theory with regard to Krista and Dylan, who showed a greater degree of ‘success’ than the other pairs in this study. Throughout this section I discuss aspects of socio-cultural theory, which may go some way towards addressing the implicit assumptions often inherent in mentoring programmes and which may provide a means of encouraging ‘successful’ youth mentoring relationships.

A critique of the implicit assumptions present in the DTS programme

Authors from a critical perspective warn that mentees can be implicitly positioned as deficient through the programme design (Colley, 2000b; Piper and Piper, 1999). I think this was true of the DTS programme. While it was unintentional, the way the programme operated subtly located the ‘problem’ of truancy within the individual mentee, which positioned them with a deficit orientation.

One way the programme operated which indicates this assumption is that the intervention offered by the DTS (i.e. mentoring) was focused only on how the students themselves could change. Mentoring was seen as a way to instil the mentees with a desire and volition to attend school and value education, which it was assumed they did not see as important. Recognisable
in this position are the underpinning assumptions of social capital theory. The mentors are the people who are believed to possess the attitudes, values, knowledge and skills necessary to effectively operate in today’s world while the mentees are lacking in these areas. By addressing the ‘deficiencies’ of the mentee the risk of later difficulty in higher education or the labour market is reduced. Interestingly, the mentees in this study for whom truancy was a problem, all acknowledged that they were aware of the importance of school, despite continuing on occasion to engage in truancy.

A second way that the operation of the programme contributed to the assumption the problem was within the individual was that it was isolated from any other context of the mentees’ lives. This included the schools and families which are acknowledged in the literature as important factors in the issue of truancy (Bell et al., 1994). The mentoring manager of this programme identified a number of characteristics that he considered contributed to truancy for these young people which included family and school difficulties. Yet these complex circumstances were not addressed by the intervention. Unintentionally the problem remained with the mentee as the ‘solution’ to the ‘problem’, thereby separating the individual from the other contexts.

Although I have criticised the DTS programme for the individualised focus it has taken to reducing truancy through mentoring, I also want to acknowledge that one of the causes of truancy is the individual’s choice to not be at school. In this case it would seem viable to use an intervention that encouraged changes to the behaviour of the individual and mentoring seems to be a useful intervention for this. However, it seems equally important to acknowledge that there are also likely to be other reasons for truant behaviour, as was the case with each of the mentees in this study. Therefore to use mentoring effectively it seems likely that implementing it alongside other interventions would be helpful. In a New Zealand study by Milne et al., (2002) that was partially successful in reducing truancy, mentoring was used as part of a multi-modal approach that addressed school, family and individual factors. Mentoring used in this way acted as a complementary intervention within a holistic approach to truancy for the individual involved. Rather than limiting the scope of intervention to “fixing” the individual, this programme used a variety of intervention measures, including mentoring, to address the multi-causal issues of truancy. If mentoring is used as an intervention to reduce truancy it may be most effective when it is embedded in a range of strategies that can deal with the complex background and circumstances that many young people who are truant seem to have. This is an area that requires further research.
Another main assumption that defined how the programme operated is that through friendship mentors would be able to encourage mentees to set goals which would help them learn to appreciate and value education more highly and therefore reduce absenteeism. It seems that because the mentoring manager viewed friendship as the main mechanism operating within the relationships, only vague direction and guidance was offered to the mentors. The perception of the mentoring manager was that the mentors in general had a high degree of success in academia and/or valued education and would therefore have the capabilities to develop a relationship with the mentee that met the programme’s objectives. The training provided by the DTS was limited to brief information about relationship building and motivation and little else of substance that offered assistance in how the intent and objectives of the programme could be met. The responsibility for the development and maintenance of mentoring relationships that impacted on the students’ truancy was, in the main, left in the mentors’ assuming capable hands. Although the Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) model is friendship based and has shown results that suggest this impacts on reducing truancy, there is also a strong structure and support base that trains and resources the mentors and supports the mentees, unlike in the DTS programme (Grossman and Tierney, 1998).

These two main assumptions impacted on both the mentors and the mentees but in different ways. For the mentors in three of the four cases there was an uncertainty about what their role as a mentor actually was, which led to varying degrees of frustration about the experience. For the mentees these implicit assumptions seemed to create a subtle resistance to being identified as ‘deficit’ which impacted on the way they responded to their mentors’ attempts at addressing the issue of truancy.

As I have suggested above there was very little guidance from the DTS about what the role of a mentor was beyond ‘being a friend’ and trying to encourage goal setting. The assumption that mentors had the skills and qualities necessary to facilitate these kind of relationships put mentors in the position of drawing on their own ways of thinking and expectations about what being in a mentoring relationship that was aimed at reducing truancy required. Millwater and Yarrow (1997) refer to the “mindsets” of mentors and suggest the attitudes, beliefs and values mentors hold facilitate their roles and interactions in the relationship. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, for at least two of the mentors in this study this resulted in experiences of frustration, confusion, uncertainty and dissatisfaction with regard to the kind of impact they expected to have. Their “mindsets” also affected the way they expected the student to respond. The other two mentors, to varying degrees, were able to adjust their
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expectations as the relationship progressed which reduced feelings of frustration and increased a sense of fulfilment from the experience.

Millwater and Yarrow (1997) suggest that if the “mindsets” of mentors are not critiqued openly, as part of initial training perhaps, there is the potential for the goals and aims that mentors have to supersede those of the mentee. Somewhat contrary to this, however, I found that there was actually a subtle vying for influence in the relationships as mentees resisted attempts by mentors to impose their view of what the relationship should be. I think that this also implies the importance of critiquing mentors’ initial expectations. However, I also add that it is equally as important to resource mentors in ways that mean they are equipped to deal with the complexities of developing a formalised relationship with the intent of reducing truancy.

The resistance shown by mentees seems to have influenced the level of frustration or satisfaction experienced by mentors. Colley (2000b) also found that mentees often resisted mentors attempts at engaging at the level of the programme’s goals, preferring instead to take advantage of the entertainment value of mentoring. This also left the mentors in her study frustrated. Gay and Stephenson (1998) suggest that mentoring which prioritises the aims of a programme is likely to be less successful because it tends to evoke resistance rather than motivation or compliance.

One of the reasons the mentees in this study may have shown resistance to the mentors attempts at addressing truancy and other issues is if the mentee did not fit the role ascribed to them by the programme objectives or the mentor’s expectations. For example, some of the mentees did not see themselves as having a problem with truancy or school that needed intervention. Therefore, as was indicated by three of the mentees, any attempts by the mentor to work on issues that were considered non-problematic from the mentee’s perspective were met with diversionary tactics. This issue has not been raised in the mentoring literature. Recruitment, persistence and consistency by mentors have all been considered as factors in the less than positive outcome results of formalised programmes (Royse, 1992; McPartland and Nettles, 1991)) but there has not been research exploring the possibility that the mentees perception of themselves may be influential in whether the programme achieves its objectives.

While mentees may resist the notion that they are ‘deficit’ it is also important to acknowledge that being identified as such is one way the young person can be recognised as potentially benefiting from intervention. Often the term ‘at-risk’ is used to describe children and young
people who, like the mentees in this study, have certain characteristics which have been identified as leading to other difficulties at a later date. Although the term ‘at-risk’ has been criticised for being overused and becoming meaningless (e.g. Tidwell and Corona Garret, 1994), others (e.g. McWhirter et al. 1999), suggest that the term ‘at-risk’ is useful because it necessitates implementing preventative strategies for young people to alleviate ‘risk’. However, as shown by this programme, some strategies can be well intentioned, but in reality, ill equipped to adequately address risk characteristics. The way friendship was used as the mechanism to address truancy in the DTS programme is an example of a well intentioned intervention that in reality appeared to lack a structure that could effectively address the issue it was attempting to. This has the potential to result in the continuation of the view that the young person is the problem if they resist the assistance offered by the mentors. As was seen in this programme, it also leaves mentors feeling somewhat unsatisfied and confused.

What is successful mentoring and how can it be encouraged?

Given the findings about the relationships between mentors and mentees an emerging question is whether these mentoring relationships were successful. Questioning this leads directly to a consideration of what defines success in a mentoring relationship. In the relationships in this study all the mentees reported having fun and being glad they had the opportunity to have a mentor. So if success was defined as providing entertainment and fun for the mentees then all the relationships in this study could be considered successful. However, while this is obviously an important part of the mentoring process for the mentees, is it enough to consider that mentoring has been successful?

Other definitions of success seem to indicate that fun and entertainment alone are not enough for it to be considered successful. The mentoring manager suggested that for him the incidence of reduced truancy or engagement into employment were the indicators of successful mentoring. In this case only one of the pairs showed this improvement consistently and truancy was actually a non-issue before the relationship began. In the studies of BBBS relationships by Morrow and Styles (1995) success was defined as a mutually satisfying relationship in which the mentee felt supported. Anne Dunphy (pers. comm.) who has been involved with two mentoring programmes in Auckland, New Zealand also considers that mutual satisfaction between mentors and mentees is an indication of success. In the current study only one pair had a stand out degree of success if it was measured in this way. Some programmes, including this one, encourage the process of goal setting, so success could be
defined in terms of whether or not goals were achieved. Again, only one pair engaged in this process and could be considered successful using this measure.

While there seems to be various ways of considering what makes mentoring relationships successful, I think running implicitly through much of the literature is the underlying assumption that youth mentoring is to encourage the development of young people. This is also suggested by the use of developmental theories to inform and justify mentoring as an intervention. This assumption would then suggest that the notion of success needs to reflect developmental outcomes in some way for the mentee as a result of participation in the relationship.

This raises the question of how development is defined. For the purposes of this study I have tended to view the kind of outcomes that are listed in evaluation studies as developmental gains for the mentee. These often include improved school attendance, academic achievement, relationships with teachers, peers and families, and reduced substance use and abuse, violent behaviour and others. I also consider, importantly, that development can occur in areas like self confidence, self esteem, self regulatory behaviour, attitudes, values and ways of thinking. In my view development is a broad concept and this is how I refer to it in this project.

One approach to try to understand more about how mentoring could be successful for young people has been to undertake research with young people about their natural support seeking behaviour as opposed to formalised relationships (e.g. Philips and Hendry, 1996). The resiliency literature has also provided a foundation for exploring natural supportive relationships in young people’s lives and has been influential in the concept of mentoring becoming a formalised intervention (e.g. Werner and Smith, 1982; Garmezy and Neuchterlin, 1972; Rutter, 1987). While this research provides useful information about the kind of support adolescents seek and from whom, for it to apply in the programmatic mentoring context the assumption is that formalised relationships can emulate what happens naturally. Lucas (2001) has suggested that using descriptions of naturally occurring relationships as the model for mentoring may contribute to unrealistic expectations about roles and potential outcomes rather than provide an understanding of the complexities of the relationship building process, particularly for mentoring relationships which are programmatically based. There are qualitative differences between supportive relationships in a natural setting and those that are initiated by a programme. For example mentees often choose who their supports are in a natural setting, and the support may be more often initiated by the mentee and sought for a
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particular reason identified by them. In a programme setting the programme managers may often have more control over these sorts of issues. Understanding how relationships work in natural settings may not fully appreciate the differences that occur in formal programme settings.

For these reasons, while I agree with authors who consider that learning more about adolescents natural support relationships and the qualities of these will help inform programmatic mentoring (Rhodes, 1994; Philip, 1999), I add the idea that it may also be helpful to understand more about adult-adolescent relationships in which there are formal objectives and specific goals, for example the teacher-student or counsellor-client relationship. The theoretical role of a mentor is not to be a teacher or a counsellor, but the dynamics of these relationships when they are positive and empowering for both participants may shed light on how to encourage similar dynamics in mentoring relationships.

Another approach that could help us understand why some mentoring relationships are more successful than others is to consider the practical processes that occur within different programmes, for example selection, training, matching and initial meeting processes. There has been one extensive analysis that included these issues, but in general the mentoring literature has not focused on detailing these kinds of processes. DuBois et al. (2002) found that programme features which enhanced effectiveness included ongoing training for mentors, structured activities for mentors and mentees, high levels of support, involvement of parents and consistent monitoring. Other research has concluded that a lack of sustained relationships over a long duration is a key factor for less than significant outcome results (e.g. Royse, 1992). There is room for more research from a practical level to follow up on the DuBois et al. (2002) review. This is an area that I also failed to address in great depth, unintentionally perhaps focusing at a more abstract level. This meant that this study, like much of the research so far, failed to appreciate the impact that these kinds of issues could have.

The most successful outcome study has been that of BBBS, a programme which first and foremost promotes friendship as the important part of the relationship and also incorporates a high degree of support and training for mentors. In this model, any developmental changes that occur for the mentee are the result of a long process of building a relationship with a mentor who becomes a person of influence over time. The study did show significant developmental gains, in areas mentioned above, for the young people involved, compared with the control group (Grossman and Tierney, 1998). Studies conducted on the actual relationship however (e.g. Morrow and Styles, 1995) use the nature of the relationship as an
indicator of success rather than the developmental gains shown by the mentee. The work that has been done in this area suggests that certain kinds of relationships are more likely to lead to developmental outcomes. While this may be an accurate assumption, there has not been work that brings these two ideas (the nature of the relationship and developmental growth) together. I think this is a particularly relevant issue, especially because the BBBS model is widely used internationally and often programmes with particular aims, like the DTS, use the foundation of friendship as the mechanism to achieve the aims of the programme with varying degrees of success.

We know from the results of BBBS evaluations that the encouragement to become a friend to the young person in this programme in many cases does lead to development. We also know that they have a highly structured organisation that promotes intensive training and support for mentors. What we know less about is the particular features of these friendship-type relationships that are more likely to encourage developmental contexts. The question, how can development best be encouraged through relationships, seems significant if mentoring is going to continue to be used as an intervention. In the conclusion to their work, DuBois et al. (2002) also suggested that much more needs to be understood about the processes of relationships if we are to help mentoring become a clearly effective intervention for young people. I agree with this. However, I also suggest we need to think about the kind of relationship dynamics that encourage developmental contexts if we are to increase the likelihood that mentoring can impact on developmental gains for young people, if the assumption holds that youth mentoring is a developmental intervention.

The findings from this study seem to indicate that we need to know more about how positive relationship with adults leads to developmental outcomes for mentees. An example of why this is important from this research is Elizabeth and Zara. They had a positive relationship and enjoyed each others company and while this seemed to be important for Zara it did not have a significant developmental impact for her, at least at the time of the interview. It is possible that as Zara matures Elizabeth will have left a stronger impression than is currently known. Lucas (2002) suggests that mentoring is a concept that can only be considered to have happened years later from a retrospective perspective. However, based on other adult/adolescent relationships in different settings like teaching and learning, I tend to think that it was possible for Elizabeth and Zara to have constructed a relationship together that did engage Zara developmentally and left Elizabeth more satisfied. It seems to me that a better understanding of how to use a positive relationship to foster interactions that promote
developmental growth could have enhanced their relationship. Alongside this is also the importance of addressing the other assumptions I raised in the earlier part of this discussion which include critiquing mentors “mindsets” and the use of deficit thinking to understand mentees.

Another example illustrating the importance of understanding more about the relationship process comes from Krista and Dylan’s experiences. Their relationship was different in two important ways to the others in this study. Firstly, their relationship seems to have been developmentally significant for Dylan and secondly, Krista felt a real sense of success and satisfaction from being involved. There were a variety of ways that Krista ad Dylan were different from the other pairs including that Krista’s educational background was similar to Dylan’s, Dylan’s sister had been mentored through the same programme so he may have had some prior knowledge of what mentoring was, and truancy was not an issue in their relationship as Dylan had returned to school voluntarily just before their relationship began. However, of particular relevance to the issues I am discussing, the dynamics of the relationship between Krista and Dylan seemed to create a context that moved beyond friendship and entertainment as well as a notion of ‘fixing’ Dylan, to a process of engaging together in a relationship that revolved around Dylan’s needs. I have been drawn to thinking about their experience in more depth to try and understand if there were significant features of the dynamics of their relationship that led to quite different, and seemingly more successful, experiences compared to the other three in this study.

Exploring the usefulness of a socio-cultural perspective in youth mentoring

The theories used presently to inform mentoring provide an important piece of the development jigsaw. Attachment theory, resiliency theory, social support theory and others all illustrate the significance for young people of meaningful relationships with at least one adult outside the immediate family. However, the actual processes that encourage development based on these relationships are less clear from these developmental theories because they have an individualistic perspective of development. For example, social capital theory suggests that young people need to have particular skills, knowledge, beliefs and attitudes ‘passed on’ or ‘transmitted’ to them via the mentors, but there is little explanation about how this process works, and if it works. There is an exception to this, however, in the use of role modelling which does suggest principles that are important in order for the process of role modelling to be successful. These include; that there will be enough interpersonal attraction to
stimulate attention from the mentee, and that the mentee has a desire to be more like the model. In this case however a mutual bond is the beginning point for the role modelling to be successful and it seems the general assumption of mentoring is that there will be enough ‘liking’ between mentor and mentee to facilitate this process. Here again though there is little information that suggests how a satisfactory mutual bond can be created.

To this end I want to tentatively suggest that ideas from a socio-cultural perspective may help us understand how the processes of social interaction between people, that is, relationships, contribute to and influence developmental growth. While all the pairs in this study showed varying degrees of ‘success’ in terms of building a relationship and encouraging development the extent that Krista and Dylan’s relationship achieved this did set them apart from the others. In my interpretation of their relationship I think that many of the dynamics they engaged in show a link to some of the important concepts of socio-cultural theory. Given the limitations in this area by the current theoretical interpretations of mentoring, the current research and the findings from this study, I think it is important to explore other ways of thinking in relation to mentoring if we are to more fully appreciate the potential for development that this intervention offers. On this basis I am suggesting that a socio-cultural lens could add useful insight both in grounding relationship processes within a developmental framework and suggesting relationship dynamics that increase the likelihood mentoring is a developmental intervention.

In coming to my own understanding about the usefulness of socio-cultural theory I have drawn substantially from an article by Gallimore, Tharp and John-Steiner (1992) which provides a comprehensive account of the assumptions of socio-cultural theory with relation to mentoring. Briefly, the following concepts are important. The first is that higher order psychological functioning originates in the context of goal directed social interaction. Secondly, that activity settings create the opportunity for mentees to participate in interactions in which higher order functions appear first on the social plane and then become internalised. Thirdly, that the kind of interactions which encourage development and learning are those in which assistance is provided that enables the learner or mentee to perform at a higher level than he/she could perform alone. Fourthly, that joint collaborative activity between participants provides the context for the most profound development, and finally that the whole of the activity, including speech and the associated emotions, can create what is referred to as intersubjectivity between participants. Intersubjectivity is significant in the development of meaning, values, affect, and motivation between the participants.
These assumptions provide a foundation for the way relationships and social interactions are organised between people to best encourage developmental outcomes. One of the most thought provoking extensions of these assumptions that was raised by Galimore et al. (1992) is that developmental gains for the young person are dependent on the nature of the activities that the mentor and mentee are jointly engaged in as much as the affective quality of the relationship. In fact, Gallimore et al., go on to suggest that the kind of attachment or identification sought through mentoring is likely to occur not as a precursor, but as a result, of successful mentoring. This view of the connection between social interactions and development further prompts questions about the current assumption that developing a friendship is the “best practice” form of mentoring to encourage developmental gains. In my view, the ideas from socio-cultural theory suggest there is a need to explore the conditions that are optimal for creating developmental contexts within mentoring relationships. I hasten to add, however, that I think socio-cultural ideas can strengthen how we approach the relationship building process within mentoring because of the indication that the friendship model does lead to significant developmental improvements. Rather than replacing what is already occurring in some programmes I think new interpretations of relationship processes can add to existing knowledge.

I have simplified the above assumptions of socio-cultural foundations for mentoring into one main idea that I think incorporates the significant features of a socio-cultural approach to youth mentoring. I consider the main assumption is that developmentally sensitive interactions are most likely to occur when participants are engaged in joint collaborative activity that is goal directed.

There are some key features in this statement that require some discussion. For ease of explanation I am going to break this main assumption into separate parts and discuss each one in turn, although in reality these ideas are not linear but are all interrelated. The components I am going to talk about are: goals, joint engagement, activity and developmentally sensitive interactions. A discussion of these components, alongside the ways in which they can be applied to Krista and Dylan’s relationship, is a starting point for coming to understand the potential contribution that socio-cultural theory could make to the youth mentoring field.

Socio-cultural theory suggests that interactions need to be goal directed if developmental contexts are to be created. Goals are important because they provide motivation for participants to engage in activities that will work towards achieving the goal. However, the goals of the mentor and mentee do not necessarily need to be the same (Gallimore et al.,
1993). In practice this means that it is likely mentors may have goals that extend to broader aims than that of the mentee. An example of this is provided by an after school programme run in the United States called the Fifth Dimension which operates by some socio-cultural tenets. From the child’s perspective the Fifth Dimension is an activity system that mixes play with education and peer affiliation (Nicolopolou and Cole, 1993). However, there is a ‘hidden agenda’ to the activity system because it encourages cognitive and social development for the young people who participate in it (http://129.171.53.1/blantonw/5dCIhse/artifacts/asumanual/0.html, 12/02/04). Play is an important part of the activity system because it provides the motivation for the children to be involved. For the developers of the programme, however, play is a tool which when organised in a particular way enables the goals of social and cognitive competence to be enhanced. For the children and the programme different goals provide the motivation to be involved.

One of the significant features of Krista and Dylan’s relationship was that Dylan identified and consequently worked on goals that were important to him. This also meant that Krista’s goal of helping a student work through their issues was met. Both of them had a high degree of motivation to be involved in the relationship.

Goals are an interesting topic because engagement mentoring is about achieving particular goals often set by the mentoring programme, as in the case of the DTS. An issue arises because programmes which have specific targets they are aiming to achieve through mentoring are often less successful at creating sustained developmental changes than the friendship model which does not prioritise goals. For example Colley (2000b) found many mentees in her study resisted working towards the goals of a programme aimed at helping them reengage into school or work despite being fully aware of these aims. An important issue seems to be the degree of participation the mentee has in the goal setting process. It seems that for goals to be useful in a mentoring context one of the mentor’s priorities needs to be finding activities that are motivating for their mentees and then working to establish goals within that setting. While the mentor may retain the focus of the programme as the overall goal, it seems important that to reach that goal activities that are valued by the mentee are first engaged in as a way of working towards the other main focus. Importantly, a socio-cultural perspective prioritises that the context in which these goals develop needs to be within the scope of the mentee’s interest, as is encouraged through the play component of the Fifth Dimension programme.
The process just described could also be considered from a behaviouristic approach in that an individual will be motivated to achieve a goal they have set and will be rewarded when the goal is achieved. In a behaviouristic model, however, the responsibility for the process rests only with the individual concerned. Adding to this perspective, socio-cultural theory places a greater degree of emphasis on the interactions between participants who are engaged in the process of achieving an individual’s goals. This is because one of the foundational tenets of socio-cultural theory is that development in all forms has its origins in social interactions between people. Vygotsky considered this to be the fundamental law of development: “any function in the child’s cultural development appears twice, or in two planes. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category” (Vygotsky, 1978 pp57). This way of thinking about development means interventions which are aimed at fostering developmental growth need to be organised in ways that facilitate social interaction in which there is the opportunity for assistance to be embedded in the interaction (Gallimore et al., 1993)

This suggests that in a mentoring context it is important that there is equal participation between participants in the activity that they are engaged in. This is what is meant by joint engagement. Each participant needs to have an active role in contributing to the activity. In terms of goals, this position suggests it is important that the goals mentors and mentees are working towards are negotiated so that both participants have a shared appreciation of the aims of their relationship and the roles they are taking in that relationship. This was a significant finding in the current study. Krista and Dylan as well as Matthew and Glen negotiated what the purpose of the relationship was which meant both participants involved could work towards meeting those purposes. Interestingly the purpose of these two relationships was not directly related to school attendance, which suggests that in an engagement context a wide degree of flexibility may be needed if the particular goals of the programme are to be met. The two pairs who had shared understandings of their purpose had a higher degree of satisfaction for the mentor from the relationship than was expressed by the other two.

One of the issues raised earlier was that there was a lack of role clarity for the mentors in particular. The example from Krista and Dylan, and also Matthew and Glen is that when there is a shared understanding of the purpose of the relationship this provides mentors and mentees with a structure for the role they take on board. For example, Krista became a monitor and encourager of Dylan’s goals, as well as a person who organised fun activities. Likewise
Dylan’s role was to work on his goals and be an active participant in that process. This indicates the position Lucas (2002) suggests, that roles in a mentoring relationship expand, contract and are maintained as a result of the participants’ interactions within that relationship. As a mentor, being able to negotiate the aims and roles of the relationship alongside the input of the mentee seems to be an important aspect of ensuring that there is a shared appreciation of the relationship, which leads to increased likelihood of developmental outcomes for the mentee and greater satisfaction for the mentor.

This sense of shared understandings between mentors and mentees is likely to contribute to, what is referred to in socio-cultural thought, as intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity refers to the way people think and experience the world in similar ways. The degree to which intersubjectivity is present, values are alike and goals are similar means more cooperation and harmony is possible (Gallimore et al., 1993). This concept suggests that if there is a shared appreciation between mentors and mentees of their experiences then this is likely to contribute to working together towards developmental growth. The notion of intersubjectivity also shifts the focus away from the individual as responsible for the ‘problem’. Instead there is the sense of a collaborative approach in which success for the mentee is interdependent on the way interactions occur with their mentor. I think the relationship between Krista and Dylan is a good example of participants who develop a high degree of intersubjectivity that has benefited their participation in the relationship.

Of note is that the precursor to intersubjectivity does not rest in the affective nature of relationship between people, but the degree of similarity of thought and experience. Therefore joint engagement in activity settings is a crucial part of the relationship process. Gallimore et al. (1993) suggest that successful mentoring is as dependent on the nature of activities as the affective bond between participants, and that it is more likely that the kind of bond sought by mentoring occurs as a result of successful mentoring rather than prior to it. This necessitates a discussion on the importance of activity because intersubjectivity is created through joint engagement in activity that means shared meanings, concepts, motivations and expectations can be acquired. I think this was also demonstrated by Krista and Dylan and is a provocative insight into the mentoring concept. Krista and Dylan’s relationship was not dependent on the kind of friendship they had. In fact Krista’s role meant on occasion she enforced boundaries that went beyond a friendship role, for example not going to see some Christmas light decorations because Dylan had not behaved appropriately. One of the characteristics that distinguished them from the other pairs in this study was that the success of their relationship
was indicated by the shared appreciation they had of their experiences and the way they thought about it. It seems that the opportunity for mentees and mentors to develop a shared sense of the purpose and goals of the relationship may be an important consideration for youth mentoring programmes, particularly those which have an engagement ethos.

The concept of activity has been widely theorised and activity theory itself developed from the ideas on activity that Vygotsky originally proposed and his later contemporaries, in particular Leont’ev, elaborated on (Jonassen and Roher-Murphy, 1999).

The concept of ‘activity’ means both the actual event engaged in as well as the kind of thinking, being and doing that occurs in the context of that event. To illustrate this concept, one of the activities Krista and Dylan engaged in was working on Dylan’s goal to manage his anger and violence. While this was an actual event, the processes that occurred within that event are also considered the ‘activity’ they were involved in. This example illustrates that activity refers to the psychological processes that occur within a social activity. The kind of activity that happens within social interaction mediates the developmental shift from the external plane to the internal plane that I referred to above. It is for this reason that the nature of activity is an important part of organising developmental contexts from a socio-cultural perspective.

One of the central features of Krista and Dylan’s relationship was that they were jointly engaged in mediating Dylan’s response to anger and violent impulses – which was one of his goals. They did this in two ways. Firstly, Krista encouraged Dylan to come up with his own solutions and prompted him when necessary in their discussions together. Secondly they worked through a book about managing anger that was initiated by Dylan. Krista’s role was providing support and guidance as they engaged in reading the book and doing the activities together.

In my interpretation of Krista and Dylan’s relationship I think their interactions indicate some important features of a socio-cultural perspective. Based on Dylan’s comments about the importance of talking with Krista about his anger (see p108) and Krista’s approach to discussion with Dylan (see p105) I consider that Krista and Dylan engaged in authentic collaborative problem solving (Englert et al., 1994). Dylan was actively involved in learning the processes of controlling his anger impulses with Krista’s assistance. I think the language Krista used in encouraging him and prompting him as well as the book they worked through shows a link to the process of appropriating and making sense of psychological tools.
(Vygotsky, 1981) that helped Dylan internalise ways of becoming less violent. The learning that occurred took place first *between* Krista and Dylan on a social plane but it became *internalised* by Dylan on the psychological plane as he appropriated the processes to control his anger that he and Krista had engaged in. Significantly, the self regulatory behaviour he learned was not ‘transmitted’ to Dylan in a one way process by Krista, but rather he was an active participant in developing meanings that arose through his interactions alongside Krista. I think this illustrates how socio-cultural ideas can add to a behaviourist approach like role modelling.

Another feature illustrated in this activity that Krista and Dylan were engaged in was that the authority in the activity was shared between Krista and Dylan, and gradually Dylan became as much an ‘expert’ as Krista in the area of anger management. Other examples of this process in their relationship are the decision making process and the way conversations were organised. In both these activities Krista initially took the ‘expert’ role but as their relationship developed Dylan appropriated these processes and there was a gradual shift in roles as he became an equal participant in conversations and making decisions, often initiating both these processes. Research from Morrows and Styles (1995) of the BBBS programme indicates these same features in relationships that were considered successful. That is, decision making is shared between the mentor and mentee and mentors are aware of and responsive to the initial lack of self-disclosure conversations they may have with their mentee. These findings illustrate that the kind of relationship processes that often already occur within some mentoring relationships have features that can potentially create developmental contexts for the mentee. Understanding these features from a socio-cultural perspective adds to our understandings of why these features are important and how they fit in the developmental picture.

The processes I have illustrated though Krista and Dylan, that is, collaborative problem solving, sharing authority and expertise, gradual shift in roles, and appropriation of meaning, are also some of the key features of the Fifth Dimension activity system. In this system the actual activity is the computer games system that children engage in but it is through working alongside the facilitators who are experts at problem solving processes, even if they are not experts at the particular games, that children begin to appropriate meanings about thinking and relating to others. Children and facilitators work alongside each other and children are assisted to become competent at the activities and thought processes they are engaged in. Gradually children can assume ‘expert’ roles within the activity system. The tools that
mediate the appropriation of various skills and abilities are the computer games themselves. These ‘tools’ provide a mechanism to enhance the children’s learning and autonomy (http://129.171.53.1/blantonw/5dClhse/artifacts/asumanual/0.html, 12/02/04). The processes that are facilitated by the way the activity setting is organised are the foundations for creating developmental contexts for the children who engage in the system.

The examples from Krista and Dylan and the Fifth Dimension programme illustrate the kind of processes that are essential, according to a socio-cultural view, if the interactions between people are to lead to developmental growth. I also suggested that some of these processes are already occurring within many mentoring relationships. However, I want to suggest that when these processes are occurring they are doing so with the aim of building the relationship, not building the competency of the young person. With a shift in focus towards learning, although not necessarily a shift in actual activity, the kinds of interactions that occur between mentors and mentees can become increasingly intentional towards developmental growth.

If participants in a mentoring relationship are jointly engaged in goal directed activity, then it is likely that the relationship is encouraging developmentally sensitive interactions. This is what Vygotsky considered the “zone of proximal development”. The outcome of working in this zone is building the existing competencies of the mentee to new levels that previously they could only achieve with assistance. I have considered that the example of Krista and Dylan illustrates they were often working in a ‘zone’ as many of their interactions encouraged a form of learning for Dylan. As a result Dylan gradually came to identify himself as a non-violent person who was much more open. I think the developmental shift in Dylan’s conception of himself was a clear result of the way the relationship between Krista and Dylan facilitated learning interactions in Dylan’s zone of proximal development.

Although learning as a means of encouraging development has not had a high priority in the mentoring literature, one study by Hamilton and Hamilton (1992), that did not have a socio-cultural perspective, found that the most successful relationships were those which focused on developing the competency and the character of the mentee. Interestingly, those relationships that prioritised building a relationship with the mentee were the least successful. They found that when mentors were focused on getting their mentee to “like them” this provided less clarity about their role. The researchers concluded that encouraging the development of competency in an activity provided a greater sense of purpose for those particular relationships which enabled them to be sustained for a greater length of time. They also concluded that the levels they identified were hierarchical so that a focus on competency
included developing the relationship. These findings support the idea that structuring activities in mentoring to incorporate a learning component is an important means of facilitating development and producing feelings of satisfaction for the mentors.

Referring back to the current study, the interactions between Roger and Caleb also illustrate the importance of learning, but in this case it was because there was less evidence of this process in their interactions. It seems Roger did try to prioritise activities for Caleb that had the potential to build up Caleb’s self esteem and self confidence. However, within those activities there was little indication of the interaction processes discussed above which encourage developmental gains. The activities were fun and entertaining but they did not facilitate a “zone of proximal development” for Caleb. Roger did not appear to negotiate his ideas of building up self-confidence and self esteem with Caleb in ways that enabled Caleb to be an active participant in the process. It seems that they were not jointly engaged in the kind of learning that facilitated the transformation of Caleb’s understanding about himself. Roger did not facilitate interactions which encouraged collaborative problem solving or enabled Caleb to begin to incorporate what he learned with Roger into his own ways of thinking and being.

However, I do want to acknowledge that Caleb does see himself as calmer now and Roger suggests Caleb’s behaviour has improved when Caleb is with him. Both of these things suggest Caleb has grown developmentally over the mentoring period. This indicates that mentoring can have an effect on development as a result of a consistent relationship over time, as the BBBS evaluation found. The question I have about Roger and Caleb’s relationship is that could it have been more productive in terms of Caleb’s development than it has? Are there processes that could more effectively have encouraged developmental growth? I believe that there are if we use socio-cultural theory as a framework for understanding the relationship between social interactions, learning and development.

This example highlights that intentionality towards particular processes is an important part of activity settings if they are to facilitate development. It suggests that developmental mentoring would require specific training to enhance the skills of mentors at recognising the ways they can encourage their mentees into ‘zones of proximal development’. In the teaching field there has been much research into training teachers to be able to facilitate learning in these particular ways so it is not an interaction process that is left to chance. Likewise in the mentoring field, there is often some training for mentors about the relationship building process but there seems to be little about building developmental relationships. As the
example from Roger and Caleb suggests, having the skills to intentionally create developmentally sensitive interactions could enhance the practices that currently occur within mentoring.

Another example of the benefits of working in the zone of proximal development comes from a teaching and learning context. Through a case study, Englert et al. (1994) illustrate the gradual development of a student’s literacy development through the apprenticeship of teachers. The teachers organised literacy activities for the student that were in advance of his competency level and provided the tools and scaffolds needed for the student to appropriate the skills and knowledge necessary to gain competence. There were a number of ways that contexts were organised to promote and facilitate literacy competency. These included some of the processes that have been discussed in this section, for example, working in the context of the student’s need, encouraging responsibility for the thinking and inner language that might begin to mediate his own actions, providing assistance and tools to help circumvent any barriers to success in achieving the activity, enabling the student to be a partner in the relationship by making decisions and transferring responsibility for those decisions and valuing the opinions of the student and allowing him to regulate the activity. What I think the article highlights is how the relationship between the teacher and the learner was organised to engage the student in learning activities jointly with the teacher and other students. When this occurred the student was able to work in his zone of proximal development and move forward in his understanding of literacy and his identification as a literate person.

One of the significant points I think is that working in a mentee’s zone of proximal development requires less affective bond and more intentional effort at organising contexts to facilitate this process. Although an affective bond is useful and important I think there is evidence here to suggest that the way we prioritise particular features of relationships may need to be addressed in the future if mentoring is to increase its potential as an effective intervention.

**Implications for the issues raised earlier**

Based on the concepts of socio-cultural ideas I have discussed here there are implications for the issues I raised in the first part of the discussion. While these have been touched on throughout the discussion on socio-cultural ideas, there are some I want to particularly highlight here.
One of the issues raised was the assumption that friendship was able to address the issue of truancy and the resulting confusion for mentors about their role because they were assumed to have the skills and qualities necessary to encourage the transition from truant to scholar. As a result of thinking about socio-cultural ideas, I think it is possible for a programme to emphasise particular goals, but the way in which these are met requires flexibility and more than a friendship. I think it requires a rethinking of the way in which development occurs between people and how that can best be managed within a mentoring context to produce the desired outcomes. In effect I think mentoring programmes need to operate from a model that has sound theoretical foundations about the process of development within relationships. This would be likely to influence the objectives of the programme and how they are carried out. I believe it would be then more likely that mentors would receive appropriate training that deconstructed their own expectations, helped mentors listen to the mentees’ perspectives and helped mentors learn how to engage with mentees in ways that encouraged the development of shared understandings and reduced the effects of confusion about expectations and roles.

Another one of the significant findings of this study was the resistance by mentees to attempts by the mentor to work on school truancy, or any other issues, in three of the four mentor-mentee pairs. One of the mechanisms suggested by the DTS was to identify and work on goals in order to encourage school attendance as well as other areas of the mentee’s life. I have previously discussed in this section the importance of goals that also exists from a socio-cultural perspective in relationships that foster developmental growth. However, I also suggested that the reason goals are important is because they provide motivation for the participants and the incentive for joint participation in activities. These factors necessitate that the goal aspect of a programme incorporates the mentees perspective, which seldom seems to be the case in engagement models and may be the reasons mentees choose to exercise resistance. Further, a socio-cultural perspective allows for the likelihood that a mentor, or programme, will have goals that are broader in scope than the mentee, like school truancy for example. But the necessity for collaboration ensures that these broader goals are met within the context of the mentee’s need which initially may not specifically focus on school attendance. Because the development of mutually understood goals is a significant part of encouraging developmental growth through relationships it is important that this process is engaged in and not left to chance through a potential friendship. I think this requires a more intentional approach from the mentor to be constantly alert for possible entry points to develop goals with the mentee. The interactions that occur within the relationship take on
added importance from this perspective. For this reason mentors would need training from a socio-cultural perspective to be able to initiate intentional interactions.

It was significant that all the mentees reported fun and engaging in fun activities with their mentor as what they enjoyed about the relationship. Studies by Morrow and Styles (1995) and Styles and Morrow (1992) also found that fun was a valuable component in the mentoring process. This suggests that fun is likely to be a dimension of mentoring relationships that needs to be prioritised. The developers of the Fifth Dimension programme recognised that to engage the children they needed to develop a system that acknowledged the interests of children. They use the term “leading activities” from Leont’ev to substantiate the need for play, which is a leading activity of young people, as part of the Fifth Dimension system. This would suggest that in a mentoring relationship the “leading activities” of young people need to be valued and considered an important part of the process. In engagement models these other needs can sometimes be overlooked as secondary to the “real issues” of mentoring. I am suggesting that fun is a real issue and that by treating it as such there will be an increased likelihood of co-jointly tackling other issues as part of a ‘hidden agenda’ as is the case in the Fifth Dimension. There is likely to be less resistance from the mentee when this leading activity is acknowledged. Fun, significantly, is prioritised in the BBBS model, which operates from a friendship perspective. However, as the Fifth Dimension highlights links can be made between fun and development through intentional management of the interactions between people. I think there is the potential for mentoring relationships to work similarly through the intentional organisation of activities and interactions which also incorporate fun.

Finally I raised the issue that the problem of truancy was located within the individual and the associated assumptions of that view. I think using socio-cultural theory as a framework for thinking about how mentoring relationships can impact on issues like truancy goes some way towards addressing this criticism. This is because it requires looking beyond what the individual can’t do and puts a focus on what they are capable of as this is the entry point for creating developmentally sensitive interactions, or as Vygotsky would say, working within the “zone of proximal development”. In this way the young person is not viewed as the problem because it is necessary to understand them in terms of their competencies in order to begin to interact in a way that promotes developmental growth. This was an obvious part of Krista’s interactions with Dylan. She constantly believed in him and viewed him as a person able to achieve the kind of goals he set out to attain.
Chapter 6

Socio-cultural theory also has a strong emphasis on the influence of the surrounding context people are part of including cultural-historical influences. Gallimore et al. (1992) refer to this as an eco-cultural niche. This means that the activities and interactions that occur between people influence and are influenced by the surrounding environmental context. A theoretical model that captures the essence of these ideas is Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model. This model has socio-cultural roots and is based on the premise that immediate relationships and broader environmental contexts are interdependent so one cannot be understood without the other (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). From this perspective too, the notion that ‘problems’ are located within the individual is minimised. A programme that was set up using socio-cultural ideas would mean it was necessary to ensure that the mentoring relationship was embedded within a framework that acknowledged the multiple influences in young people’s lives and sought to understand how other settings impacted on the choices young people were making. This seems particularly relevant in an engagement model when there are aims like reducing truancy because of the multi-causal nature of this problem. One of the issues I raised earlier in the discussion was the tension that emerged from the expectation of the DTS that the mentoring relationships would impact on other settings of the young person’s life, school in particular, when in practice these relationships were isolated from the other contexts and had no means of addressing other issues that arose. I think that by taking a contextual view of mentoring these tensions are more likely to be avoided.

Limitations of a socio-cultural perspective

While I have attempted to highlight the potential usefulness of a socio-cultural approach to mentoring in this discussion I want to also suggest that there are certainly limitations to these ideas as well. It would be unwise to suggest that the ideas I have presented here are a panacea solution to the challenges of youth mentoring that have been identified both in the literature and in the relationships I encountered in this study.

Socio-cultural theory and its derivatives like activity theory, are complex theories with broad scope and highly detailed arguments. In my use of the principles I think are relevant for youth mentoring I have risked simplifying the theoretical ideas and reducing the complexities by discussing select assumptions that met the needs of this study. To work towards the application of socio-cultural theory to youth mentoring requires, I believe, a much more thorough review of socio-cultural literature and its applications to other fields. From here it would be possible to develop programmes based on the principles of socio-cultural theory.
One of the biggest challenges I perceive from working within a socio-cultural perspective is discovering an activity setting that can facilitate developmentally sensitive interactions. Interest has a large role in this process but it also seems to present some difficulty. How does the mentor figure out interests or negotiate goals with a non-communicative young person? Another question is how can interests be turned into activity settings that engage the mentee in learning? For example Roger identified that Caleb had a keen interest in mountain biking, but can this become a setting in which learning is encouraged? Would going on more challenging rides or learning how to maintain the bike be considered activities that are likely to work in Caleb’s zone of proximal development? Would these kind of activities be likely to impact on school attendance?

Work by Litowitz (1993) highlights that even under optimal conditions resistance can still be engaged in by would be learners, or in the context of mentoring, mentees. Part of her work has considered that resistance to working in a zone of proximal development by a learner can in part be caused from a desire to be independent and not controlled by another. She suggests that in these circumstances resistance occurs because the ‘learner’ is motivated to become like the other participant in the interaction by means of mastering independently the activity they are engaged in. I see parallels in this idea to the relationship between Elizabeth and Zara. Zara was an independent person who resisted attempts at authority over her. She also seemed to value Elizabeth and aspired to be like her in some ways. Given this work from Litowitz it suggests that it is possible Zara resisted the helping nature of Elizabeth because she had a stronger desire to independently develop academic competence. This suggestion from Litowitz raises an interesting strand to socio-cultural ideas and would require some further investigation in the context of mentoring.

Another interesting consideration is whether it would be helpful if mentees had some kind of initial exposure to what mentoring is and the kind of expectations of the programme. In the Fifth Dimension the children who enter the system are aware of the expectations of engaging in the programme. These are set out in a constitution that has been organised to become part of the play system. Likewise in teaching and learning contexts the expectations of learning are clear from the contextual setting that children and young people are engaged in. Dylan had also been exposed to the mentoring process before and so may have had some ideas about what mentoring entailed which helped him become responsive to the processes they engaged in. One of the challenges this poses for mentoring is how to present this information to the
mentees in a fun and collaborative way that also ensured their input was sought after, valued and used.

A final question is whether young people need a certain level of cognitive and social ability to engage in the kind of processes that occurred between Krista and Dylan. Was Dylan better able to engage in these processes because he could engage in the kind of thinking that was necessary? Because socio-cultural theory has been applied to the special education sector successfully I would suggest that this perspective is particularly relevant for creating developmental contexts for young people who require extra assistance. How this process would work in practice is an area that requires a deeper analysis of the application of socio-cultural theory to youth mentoring.

My intention here has been to engage in a discussion of ideas that I think could be a helpful direction to move forward in as the interest in youth mentoring continues. However, being aware of these limitations and others is important if we are to appreciate fully the opportunity socio-cultural theory has to make an impact on youth mentoring.
Chapter 7  IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Highlighted in this chapter are the most important implications arising from this work in the form of general questions regarding youth mentoring and specific implications for youth mentoring programmes. I also suggest areas for further research and discuss the limitations of this research.

7.1 Implications

The work I have done here leads me to consider the implications that it has for both implementing mentoring programmes and research in the mentoring field. I first want to consider two general questions for the mentoring field before discussing the specific implications that arose from engaging in this particular study. I hope these implications I have developed will be useful to others interested in developing a mentoring programme. Following this I suggest areas that could benefit from further research.

7.1.1 General questions

I have discussed that in general most mentoring interventions seem to have the common purpose, whether in the form of specific aims or using friendship, of promoting youth development. One of the questions I think this research raises is whether there is a need for the underlying notion that youth mentoring is a developmental intervention to become more explicit. This is an important issue, I believe, because it may encourage a more considered approach to thinking about how relationships could be organised to meet the objective of
youth development. While the BBBS evaluative research has had positive outcome results from their programme there is limited understanding about how and why friendship leads to these outcomes. Thinking about what promotes developmental growth for young people may add to what we understand about the characteristics of relationships that are important to meet this end. In this research I have suggested a tentative beginning point for work that may continue to examine the kind of features that encourage development within relationship settings.

Following from the above question, I think another issue that needs addressing further is whether we should continue to place a high emphasis on mentors building a friendship kind of relationship with a mentee or whether we should be encouraging mentors to build the competencies of their mentees by engaging them in learning through meaningful, interesting and relevant interactions. The most developmentally successful relationship in this research indicated significant learning elements. Research by Hamilton and Hamilton (1992) also suggests being involved in building the competency of mentees leads to more successful relationships. Although these are tentative beginnings I think the relative success of Krista and Dylan in this research suggests it is an important avenue to explore. I have suggested that socio-cultural theory could be a useful lens through which this kind of exploration is possible because the underlying principle of this approach is that learning in social settings facilitates development.

7.1.2 Specific implications

In this project the assumptions that were made by the mentoring manager impacted on the way the programme operated. There were at least three examples of this. Firstly, assumptions existed about mentees which positioned them with a deficit orientation that they consequently resisted. Secondly, mentors were assumed to already possess appropriate skills to engage in an effective mentoring relationship, yet they were under-prepared and they received little guidance or direction. Thirdly, friendship was assumed to be able to impact on the issue of truancy and this also contributed to mentors sense of confusion about their role because addressing truancy may require a different set of objectives than becoming a friend. I think this suggests that being aware of implicit assumptions that may be unconsciously embedded either in the personal philosophies of programme co-ordinators or in programme designs may be a helpful thing to think about when planning to implement a mentoring programme.
The kind of mentor training that occurred in this programme appeared to be limited in terms of skills that mentors would need to meet the aims and objectives of the programme. This appears to have been influenced by the assumption that mentors already possess capabilities that will ‘see them right’. However, mentoring is a complex relationship. It is set up artificially through a third party between two people who do not know each other. It is not usually part of the natural networks of young people, or the adult mentors. I think these factors alone suggest that relying on good will and the capacity to build a friendship may not be enough to develop and sustain effective relationships. I have also suggested in this work that it may be important to consider the kind of features that facilitate developmental contexts within these relationships, as well as an affective relationship. Using socio-cultural theory I suggested some principles of interaction within relationships that may be useful, however to better understand these requires further research. Even without focusing explicitly on relationships that specifically encourage development, the relationship building process itself is complex given the circumstances of mentoring and as such should be prioritised in training programmes. Significantly, the BBBS programme has a sophisticated training programme, this may be an influential factor in the reasons for the successful outcomes this programme shows in the research.

Another aspect of training that I think is significant is addressing the way that mentors conceptualise both the mentoring process and their potential mentees prior to engaging in the relationship. As we saw in this project, leaving mentors to rely heavily on their own expectations meant in some cases high levels of dissatisfaction and frustration when these expectations were unable to be met. To address this seem to require a process of ‘deconstructing’ the expectations and assumptions that mentors may have. This process will importantly bring into conscious awareness any expectations that exist, they are often so embedded that we are unaware we have them. In this study for example, Elizabeth, when first asked, did not think she had any prior expectations but as a result of our conversation came to realise that she did have expectations based on her past experiences. Raising awareness of the way mentors may expect to participate in the experience may better prepare them for handling circumstances which don’t meet their expectations. It may also be likely that mentors can more easily adjust their expectations if they are more aware of them. As was illustrated by this research, mentors who could modify their expectations seemed to engage in more satisfying relationships.
Chapter 7

A third aspect of training that I think is important is including the mentees perspective of mentoring. In this programme there seemed to be very little about the actual mentee and what there was had a deficit orientation. What we saw some evidence of from the mentees is that they may not identify with the perceptions that mentors or mentoring programmes may have of them which can lead to resistance in programmes which try to impose particular aims and objectives. I think a useful way to begin to minimise the possible tension that exists from this situation is to encourage young people who have been mentees or who are potential mentees to partake in some of the training process. Young people are often receptive to sharing their views if they are valued; I found this in my interviews with the young people in this study. Finding a way to incorporate the perspective of the mentee in training could be a valuable practice to enhance mentors’ understanding of what is important to a mentee and hence reduce the tension that can develop for mentors.

Incorporating the mentees perspective in training may also mean mentors are encouraged to do the same in their relationships. Processes that help mentors and mentees develop a similar appreciation of the purpose of their relationship seems an important finding to have come out of this study. The relationships in which there was the most satisfaction for the mentors were those where mentors and mentees shared an understanding about the purpose of the relationship and their interactions together reflected that purpose. This is also an idea that is encouraged from a socio-cultural perspective. It seems that whatever the aims of the programme, it is important to place a priority on a flexible approach that enables mentors and mentees to discover goals that are motivating for them both and encourages their participation in working towards those goals. As suggested by socio-cultural ideas this may mean that mentors have a ‘hidden agenda’ for the activities they engage in with their mentee but it is important primarily that the activity first of all is motivating for the mentee.

Finally, it seems important that mentoring programmes consider whether it is useful to be affiliated to other institutions and interventions. For example, in this research it would have been useful in most instances for the mentors to have been more integrated with the school but this was not encouraged and in fact the mentoring manager did not even see himself as needing a role in the school. Given the programme was focused on school related issues and truancy in particular it seems likely that a relationship with the schools could have been useful. Connections to other institutions may be a relevant consideration for programmes that are attempting to address specific issues.
7.1.3 Areas for further research

Part of this project has been a tentative suggestion that socio-cultural theory is a useful perspective to help us understand in more depth the dynamics of developmental relationships and how to encourage those in a mentoring setting. To explore these concepts further a more rigorous kind of research would be required. This would necessitate a review of the concepts discussed in this research to a greater degree to develop ways in which these concepts could be applied and design a programme to reflect socio-cultural principles. Subsequent monitoring and evaluation of a programme set up from a socio-cultural perspective in both qualitative and quantitative forms would be necessary to assess if the kind of developmental and satisfaction gains I am suggesting are of significance.

There seems to be a great deal of scope for understanding more about developmental relationships. I think it would be helpful to look at successful relationships in other settings between adults and young people, such as teaching and learning or counselling, that facilitate positive developmental outcomes for young people. The kinds of processes and dynamics that occur within those setting could provide useful insight to further our understanding about creating relationships between people that foster positive growth.

In general in the mentoring literature I think there is a need for more research which develops the perspective of the people involved in the mentoring process, and in particular the voice of the mentee. There is only a handful of studies in this area as most research has concentrated on discussing the benefits or challenges of mentoring using an outcome focused approach. I think much could be learned about mentoring from understanding the experiences of the participants and the kind of things that impact on those experiences. The voice of the participant’s offers insights that can impact on the way mentoring is conceptualised by researchers and practitioners to benefit those who are engaged in the relationship process.

There are numerous possibilities for research undertaken in New Zealand. At this stage there is very little literature available about programmatic youth mentoring in this country. This is likely to be because mentoring is a relatively new concept to be used as a formalised means of intervention. As its popularity grows and mentoring programmes proliferate one area of importance will be understanding how the unique cultural identity that we have in New Zealand is best incorporated into formalised mentoring programmes. One programme, He Ara Tika, is specifically tailored to Maori and is in its early stages. Once more is understood about its value and the challenges it faced as a programmatic form of mentoring it will be of benefit
to many people interested in using mentoring as a form of promoting the health and well-being of young people in New Zealand.

7.2 Limitations

While this study raises some important issues for researchers and practitioners in the youth mentoring field, the limitations on this research should be kept in mind when considering the results.

This was a small sample size within a particular programme run in certain way by a particular mentoring manager. While the results highlight some provocative issues they cannot be generalised across all youth mentoring programmes. Instead these results provide a foundation for useful areas of investigation for people who may be considering running a mentoring programme or those who are trying to encourage more effective mentoring relationships in existing programmes.

In the interviews with the mentees I had some difficulty engaging with them to a level that elicited data that was as rich as I had hoped. One possible solution to this that I raised in the methodology (Chapter 3) is the use of focus groups which other researchers suggest is a useful way to interact with adolescents in interview situations (Eder and Fingerson, 2000). I think the voice of the mentee is an important perspective of mentoring that has been neglected in the current research literature. While I also in failed some ways to take account of this voice as much as I originally intended I do think it is an area that needs more attention in the current literature.

I also mentioned in chapter three that my identification with the mentors in this study unintentionally meant that I privileged their voice over that of the mentees in the data collection phase. I believe this impacted on the way the stories were told. In most cases the perspective of the mentor is more prominent than that of the mentee. This issue may be able to be resolved by using different ways for the data to be collected from mentees as mentioned above but also by researchers being aware of the possibility they may more easily identify with one group of participants than another. Putting measures in place to assess whether this is happening and means to address it may be a useful approach to take.
Another limitation from the interview data is that most of the interviews were retrospective. This required that for some of the questions mentors and mentees needed to think back to how they were thinking and feeling more than a year from the time of the interview. The original research intention was to interview people who were in the beginning middle and end phases of their relationship which would have given me prospective data on each of the three periods of time and reduced the need for retrospective thinking from the participants. Unfortunately data collection difficulties meant this could not happen. Another option, if there is an extended period of data collection, would be to follow one mentor-mentee pair for the duration of their relationship as another way to understand the development of that experience. This may be a valuable area for other researchers to consider.

The study is also bounded by my own interpretation of the data. I came to the research with my own perspectives and as such it is influenced by my subjectivity. Other researchers coming from other perspectives may have retold these stories with emphases on different aspects. One area which I acknowledge this may be likely to be the case is with the issues of class, ethnicity and gender to which I have paid relatively little attention. While I did not consider these issues arose as main focuses of the project I appreciate that a researcher coming to this work with a different perspective may find among the stories of the participants a wealth of further work to be done with regard to how these three issues are dealt with in programmatic mentoring.
EPilogue

During the closing moments of writing I am fortunate to have been offered a job as a youth mentoring programme co-ordinator implementing a new programme in a smaller community in New Zealand. The work I have done here has instantly increased its value to me. By engaging research which endeavoured to understanding the concept of mentoring from the point of view of mentors and mentees I feel i have gained insight in ways that has been immensely beneficial. I have come away with a deeper appreciation of the kinds of issues that can create tensions and challenges within mentoring relationships, as well as engaged in some thinking about potential ways of resolving some of these issues.

So as I embark on practicing what I have learned, the kinds of questions I will be contemplating include; what is the intention of the programme, are there underlying assumptions about what the programme expects to achieve that need to be made explicit, what kind of role do we expect mentors to have, how can we best prepare mentors for that role, what kind of expectations do mentors already have, are they are aware of them, how might they impact on their experience, how have we defined mentees, is this useful, have we sought mentee's own understandings about themselves and how could this be useful in our training programme, what kind of relationship are we encouraging between our mentors and mentees – a friendship or something more, how can we support both our mentors and mentees most effectively, how can we as a programme encourage motivated participants in the programme.

These are the kind of questions that have become important to me following my immersion in this study. While factors like frequency of meetings, duration of meetings, matching of mentor-mentee pairs, initial meeting processes and basic training remain important issues in co-ordinating a programme my thoughts have been extended to consider a number of other issues that impact on how a programme is run and the kind of outcomes it has for mentees and mentors.

I’m looking forward to the challenges and rewards from my new position and I am glad I have been engaged in a discussion of these issues for the benefits it will bring to the way I conceptualise and coordinate a mentoring programme.
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Dear Mentor [Name],

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. It is important that you understand the purpose of the study and appreciate the value I place on your involvement. I hope this letter will go someway to answering any questions you may have regarding the project, and your involvement in it.

About Me

I am currently completing an MA thesis through the Education Department at the University of Canterbury. I have a strong interest in educational and mental health issues for young people and have chosen to study a topic that relates to both these issues for my thesis.

About the Project

The aim of my study is to try to understand mentoring relationships between young people who are choosing to be absent from school and volunteer mentors. I hope to learn about what happens when a mentor and student are together and how the mentoring relationship is experienced by each party.

How You Can Help

I am interested in the relationship you had with the student you mentored. I am hoping to discover more about the mentoring process and the significance of being part of a mentoring relationship. This means it would be really helpful for me to talk with you about your experience as a mentor. It may be that I will need to talk with you more than once to fully capture your thoughts on being part of a mentoring relationship. It is also likely that I will record our conversations so that I am better able to remember what was discussed.

What happens to the information you give me?

The information will be used in the writing of my MA thesis. I may also use the information for publications in referred journals or presentations. At all stages of the process I will ensure that your confidentiality and anonymity will be preserved by providing a pseudonym, keeping any information you supply locked in a filing cabinet at university, and disguising any identifying information about you.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. If you would like to contact someone from the university regarding this procedure, please feel free to get in touch with either Dr. Jean McPhail (03) 364 2271 or Dr. Bob Manthei (03) 364 2266 who are my supervisors for this project.

If you would like to withdraw at any time you can do so. Any information you have supplied to this point will be returned to you and will not longer be part of the project.

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I can be contacted at home on 348 6860 or at university on 364 2987 extension 8212. I will be happy to discuss and further questions or concerns you may have about your participation in the project.

Thank you for your time.

Rosemary King
Name of the Project: The Experience of Mentoring Relationships
Name of Researcher: Rosemary King

Dear Student [Mentee Name],

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. It is important that you understand the purpose of the study and appreciate the value I place on your involvement. I hope this letter will go someway to answering any questions you may have regarding the project, and your involvement in it.

About Me

I am currently completing an MA thesis through the Education Department at the University of Canterbury. I have a strong interest in educational and mental health issues for young people and have chosen to study a topic that relates to both these issues for my thesis.

About the Project

The aim of my study is to try to understand mentoring relationships between young people who are choosing to be absent from school and volunteer mentors. I hope to learn about what happens when a mentor and student are together and how each party experiences the mentoring relationship.

How You Can Help

I am interested in the relationship you had with your mentor. I am hoping to discover more about what you did with your mentor and the significance for you of being part of that mentoring relationship. This means it would be really helpful for me to talk with you about your experience. It may be that I will need to talk with you more than once to fully capture your thoughts on being part of a mentoring relationship. It is also likely that I will record our conversations so that I am better able to remember what was discussed.

There may also be the possibility that I bring you together with some other people who also had a mentor for a while so that you can talk about your experiences together. This would involve getting to a venue, however I can assist with transportation to and from the venue if it is needed.

What happens to the information you give me?

The information will be used in the writing of my MA thesis. I may also use the information for publications in referred journals or presentations. At all stages of the process I will ensure that your confidentiality and anonymity will be preserved by providing a pseudonym, keeping any information you supply locked in a filing cabinet at university, and disguising any identifying information about you.

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I can be contacted at home on 348 6860 or at university on 364 2987 extension 8212. I will be happy to discuss and further questions or concerns you may have about your participation in the project.

Thank you for your time.

Rosemary King
The Experience of Mentoring Relationships

Consent Form (Mentor)

I have read and understood the description of this study. On this basis, I agree to participate in the study.

I agree to the results of the study being published on the understanding that my anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that I may withdraw from the study at any time and that any information I have already given will be returned to me and not be used.

I understand that this study has received approval from the Human Ethics Committee, Canterbury University.

Signed:

Mentor ___________________________ Date ______________

Researcher ________________________ Date ______________
Appendices
The Experience of Mentoring Relationships

Consent Form (Student)

I understand the aim of this study and my participation in it. I agree to participate in this study.

I agree to the results of the study being published as long as my own anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that I may withdraw from the study at any time and that any information I have already given will be returned to me and not be used.

I understand that this study has received approval from the Human Ethics Committee, Canterbury University.

Signed:

Student ___________________________ Date ________________

Researcher _________________________ Date ________________
The Experience of Mentoring Relationships

Consent Form (Caregiver)

I have read and understood the description of this study. I agree to participate in the study, and give my permission for my child to participate in the study.

I consent to the publication of the results of the study with the understanding that my own and my child’s anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that I may withdraw from the study at any time, and any information I have supplied to this point will be returned to me.

I understand that this study has received approval from the Human Ethics Committee, Canterbury University.

Signed

Caregiver ____________________________  Date ________________
Mentoring Programme
Application Form

Applicant’s Full Name _____________________________________________________

Current Address _________________________________________________________

Phone: Home ___________________ Mobile _____________________

Work ______________________ Email _______________________

Home Address (if different from above) ______________________________________

____________________________________________________________

Gender: Male / Female Date of Birth __________________________

Religion (if important to your life style) _________________________________

Do you identify with any ethnic groups? _________________________________

Do you have any Special Needs or Disabilities that we should know about? Yes / No

If yes, please explain: _________________________________________________

Hobbies and Interests: _________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

Current Course of Study: _____________________________________________

Occupations(s) _______________ How long? ____________________________

Name, Address and Phone number of Employer and/or training institution ______

____________________________________________________________

Past or Present Involvement with other Voluntary Organisations and Youth Programmes:

____________________________________________________________

Relevant Qualifications and Skills ______________________________________

____________________________________________________________

Do you have a current Driver’s Licence? Yes / No

Access to a car? Yes / No
Appendices

Vehicle Insurance? Yes / No  Company ____________________________

Please list any driving convictions ________________________________

Have you ever been convicted of any criminal offences? Yes / No

If YES, please explain ____________________________________________

How would you describe your personality? __________________________

______________________________________________________________

As a Mentor, what would be your main goals? ________________________

______________________________________________________________

Other comments in support of your application ______________________

______________________________________________________________

Availability for contact with student:

I am available: Daily / 2-3 times weekly / weekly / fortnightly

For: a brief period (e.g. 10 min phonecall) / one hour / two hours / three hours

Length of time available: ______________ months

If due to leave Christchurch, when? ________________________________

Availability for Supervision / Training: ____________________________

______________________________________________________________

Please list TWO referees to be contacted by the Manager (consider an academic referee)

______________________________________________________________

Character Referees:

______________________________________________________________

Declaration by applicant seeking participation as a Mentor:

I have not withheld disclosure of any criminal convictions and by signing below consent to a Police Check.

Signed: ____________________________  Date _______________________
Mentoring Programme
Student Referral Form

Name __________________________________________

Home Address ________________________________________

Day to Day Caregivers Name ________________________________________

Relationship to Client ______________________________________

Contact number ______________________________________

Gender: Male / Female Date of Birth _______ Age ________

Ethnicity ______________________ School ______________________

If New Zealand Maori, Iwi if known ______________________________________

Interests ____________________________________________

In what ways would a mentor be helpful to this student? ______________________

_________________________________________________

Any relevant medical conditions or disabilities that a mentor should be aware of? ___

_________________________________________________

Other relevant information ____________________________________________

_________________________________________________
Mentors were asked about the following topics during interviews. This is not an exhaustive list of questions but rather a guideline used to steer the interview:

- Their experience of school/mentoring
- Their notions of truancy
- Their reasons for getting involved, their history of volunteering
- The process that occurred from applying to being connected to a mentor. Think about feelings, thoughts, images. Use imagined or remembering questions. What where you told from the beginning? How did training work? Did these things shape your expectations?
- Tell me about the first time you met, what happened? How did you feel? What was the family input, if any?
- Tell about how it worked from there, ask about significant memories or events and the feelings or thoughts that these evoked – building rapport, conversations, activities, time spent.
- Support from the programme (supervision, other contact, training)
- Problems and discoveries
- “Successful relationship” – what does that mean?
- Why was yours able to be successful, or not?
- Relationship with family
- If doing it again, anything you would do differently, or any advice for someone doing it?
Mentees were asked about the following topics during interviews. This is not an exhaustive list of questions but rather a guideline used to steer the interview:

- How did [your mentor] come to be your mentor? What happened? Who were the people that set that up for you? Why do you think that you needed a mentor? Do you think you needed a mentor?

- What was it like when you first met your mentor?

- What was it like hanging out with your mentor? What did you guys do? What do you talk about? What is it like having someone who isn’t you caregiver to hang around with?

- Do you ever talk to your mentor at any other time or do you only talk to them when they came to see you?

- What would be some words that you would use to describe your relationship with your mentor?

- Would you ever have a mentor again? How come? If you know someone who was going to be a mentor what sort of advice would you give them? What do you think would be important for them to know?

- Why do you think you and your mentor got on so well?

- Can we talk a little bit about your school experiences?