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Publication Date	2020-09-07
Publisher	Routledge

The methodological issues in the assessment of quality and the benefits of formal youth mentoring interventions - the case of the Czech Big Brothers Big Sisters/Pět P mentoring programme

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Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss the evolution of methodology on assessing the quality and benefits of formal youth mentoring interventions. We argue that the research and praxis of youth mentoring programmes currently need to implement more qualitative research methods to gain an in-depth understanding of the principles of mentoring and the relational features that mediate its benefits.

We understand mentoring in this text as a social phenomenon that naturally exists in human social networks. We think that beneficial youth mentoring interventions should aim to facilitate relationships in the qualities of natural mentoring, to achieve the benefits of formal mentoring for children and young people. Thus, first in this chapter, we focus on identifying what we recognise as the quality features of the natural mentoring relationship. We also show that the link between natural mentoring and formal youth mentoring interventions is elaborated in the Mentoring Process Model (Rhodes, 2005).

Later in the text, we discuss research methods used in current mentoring literature and the efficacy of these on how to develop high standards for quality mentoring social and support services within a given educational or social context. We particularly argue that the currently available research evaluations generally underestimate the role of the theoretical rationale and, as a result, they lose the “interpretive” power to understand manifestations of relational quality and the perceived benefits of mentoring interventions.

Finally, using a brief review of studies conducted by the authors of this chapter on the Czech mentoring programme Big Brothers Big Sisters/Pět P between 2004 and 2017, we propose the qualitative “interpretive

perspective” as a promising methodological approach for addressing the gaps in current knowledge in the field of youth mentoring.

1. The phenomena of natural mentoring and its link to formal youth mentoring research

A natural mentoring relationship (NMR) is a mutual caring connection between an older, wiser, caring mentor and a younger, less-experienced mentee that can be formed and developed spontaneously at any time during the lifespan. Natural mentoring relationships have been part of our organic social networks. They are observable as human relationships that have been developed over generations throughout history (Freedman, 1992). The first use of the word “Mentor” is in Homer's *Odyssey*.¹ An NMR is one where someone gains new knowledge, support, and personal development as a result of the bond (Bennetts, 2003). It facilitates social learning, where the mentee acquires a particular set of skills, values, and practices (Rogoff, 1990; Blinn-Pike, 2007), higher resiliency in risk behaviour, development in social relationships and improved attitudes to school and education as well as a sense of well-being and health as a result of a mentoring bond (Rhodes, Contreras and Mangelsdorf, 1994; Werner and Smith, 2001; Zimmerman, Bingenheimer and Notaro, 2002; DuBois and Silverthorn, 2005; Sánchez, Esparza, Berardi and Pryce, 2011; Van Dam et al., 2018). An NMR is characterised by mutual respect, loyalty and an interest in facilitating social, emotional, and cognitive learning that affects positively on the mentees’ development (Ibid). As well as forming a secure emotional bond with a mentee, the mentor offers models of behaviour, values, attitudes and practical, problem-solving skills. They offer social support that gives mentees opportunities to learn and develop talents and abilities (Ibid).

Thus, mentors facilitate mentees’ social and emotional growth and the development of children's competence and autonomy (Dolan and Brady, 2012; Brumovská and Seidlová Málková, 2010; Cutrona, 2000;

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The principle of the relationship in the *Odyssey* is the close, caring, and supportive connection in which the mentor functions as a role model for Telemachus. The mentor mediates his experiences, opinions, knowledge, and attitudes while caring for Telemachus's positive development during the years of his adolescence (Freedman, 1992).

Weinstein and Ryan, 2000; Ryan and Solky, 1996). Natural mentors are most often grandparents, uncles, aunts, neighbours, parents of a boy- or girlfriends, youth leaders, or members of church groups (Werner and Smith, 2001). More in-depth studies on natural mentoring processes and principles that mediate mentoring benefits in children and youths' development are yet to be conducted to fill the gap in the current literature. The occurrence of natural mentoring and its perceived benefits among children and young people in Europe have notably not yet been explored in depth (Rhodes, 2018; van Damm et al., 2018; Brumovská, 2017).

To some extent, we can understand how a theory of mediated learning proposed by Vygotsky (1978) and later elaborated by Feuerstein and colleagues into a mediated learning experience theory (1988) is linked to youth mentoring as a theoretical framework for explaining principles and the importance of natural mentoring. However, both Vygotsky and Feuerstein primarily emphasise the role of the social interaction of an intentioned adult and a child from the perspective of learning processes and cognitive skills development. The mentoring research, on the other hand, seeks specifications of how natural mentoring (the frame and the space for mediated learning) is supported in different social settings of current societies to enable the positive cognitive, socio-emotional and individual development of a mentee (Brumovská, 2017).

Following the observation of benefits of natural mentoring relationships, Rhodes (2005), from the outset of research literature in the field of youth mentoring, proposed the first theoretical model on helping processes in formal mentoring relationships. This model, called Pathways of Benefits in FYMRs (Ibid) identifies key features of mentoring that create conditions that are beneficial for children and youths. Rhodes developed the model on a strong background of social-psychological theories, mentoring research at the time, as well as on the observation of natural mentoring relationships in her professional practice. She argues that mentoring has a positive impact on a mentee's socio-emotional, cognitive and identity development. Her model distinguishes casual, moderating and mediating aspects and social actors. She was the first author who

included relevant social actors and their influence on the benefits of FYMRs on mentees' development.

What is of great importance in Rhodes's model is the identification of the relational features that predict the quality of mentor-mentee relational characteristics. These identified features – the experiences of closeness, trust and empathy – indeed mediate the benefits (positive results) of natural mentoring relationships and in formal mentoring relationships, if thrived (see also Brumovska, Seidlová Málková, in print for further discussion). Rhodes's model is essential in the development of praxis in formal youth mentoring interventions as it introduces and applies the principles and benefits of natural mentoring in formal youth mentoring relationships.

2. The problem of evaluating efficacy in formal youth mentoring interventions

Natural mentoring relationships are claimed to be vulnerable or even malfunctioning in societies with post-modern family systems (Beck, 1992; Freedman, 1992; Singly, 1999). Formal youth mentoring interventions have thus been used as prevention and early intervention services for socially disadvantaged children and young people across Europe and the USA. In recent decades they have gained popularity in the praxis of social and educational services and attracted the attention of social sciences researchers (Dolan and Brady, 2012; Brumovská and Seidlová Málková, 2010; Hall, 2003).

Formal youth mentoring interventions, where socially disadvantaged children and young people benefit from quality interactions and relationships with volunteer mentors, aim to foster the roles and qualities of (missing) natural mentors. In other words, theoretically, characteristics, qualities and benefits of natural mentoring relationships are systematically implemented in a professional social/educational framework to subsidise deficits in natural mentoring relationships (Brumovská, 2017; Brumovská and Seidlová Málková, 2010). Research studies conducted to date, however, showed that formal mentoring relationships are not automatically beneficial for mentees, they need to be carefully organised and in certain circumstances can be harmful to

mentees (Brumovská, 2017; Spencer, 2007; Colley, 2003; Grossman and Rhodes, 2002; Morrow and Styles, 1995, 1992). Thus, there still is a need for more research on effective strategies to implement natural mentoring principles into professional social/educational intervention systems.

The so-called “positivist paradigm” is characterised by a firm belief in the existence of an external, physical reality guided by underlying laws, and by a conviction that knowledge of this reality can be uncovered using correct scientific methods (Clarke, 2009). The positivist perspective originates in the natural sciences, where it typically concentrates on discovering underlying causal principles (Javornicky, 2018). Research and evaluation studies of formal youth mentoring interventions rooted in evidence-based approaches typically use methodology tightly linked to cause and effect, experimental principles using positivist views on the research problems. The critical issue in this approach is a theoretical claim (hypotheses) relating mentoring implementation to improvements at the level of children's (risk) behaviours and social relationships. Of course, the “theoretical” presumptions creating the baseline for experimental intervention studies are of crucial importance here. The more general the hypotheses would be, the more vague or particular the results we should expect.

Mentoring relationship literature and praxis seem to traditionally believe in the “corrective” impact of mentoring on children and young people. In other words, research in the field of mentoring relationships traditionally focused on proving the corrective effects of mentoring interventions on young people's identified deficits and anti-social behaviours (Brumovská and Málková, 2010; Brady and O'Regan, 2009; Colley, 2003; Philip, 1997). The methodology used to explore these possible causal relations should then have the capacity to prove the existence, strength or importance of these theorised relations.

Besides, various experimental and quasi-experimental studies of the outcomes of mentoring interventions share the presumption that mentoring functions as a stress and risk buffer and thus as a protective factor in children's resilience (Werner and Smith, 2002; Dolan et al., 2010; Brady and O'Regan, 2009). Evaluations, therefore, focus on measures in children's and young people's perceptions of social supports

and in their resiliency and well-being, comparing these before and after their experiences in the mentoring programmes.

Randomised Control Trial (RCT) design is one example of a preferred experimental methodology in this regard. For instance, the major RCT study carried out on probably the most popular and researched mentoring programme, the Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) programme by Public/Private Ventures in the USA (Tierney et al., 1997) studied the impact of mentoring on young people in terms of positive changes in mentees' anti-social and risk behaviours. It concluded that youths with a mentor were less likely to hit someone or to start using drugs or alcohol, had better school attendance and results, had improved attitudes to completing schooling and education, and had improved relationships with family and peers than control-group youths with the same issues (Tierney et al., 1995). Results of this study served as essential guidance in decisions at the level of social policy on the implementation of youth mentoring interventions in the USA. At the same time, RCT research designs in a real setting are known to be challenging to implement, time-consuming and costly (Kraemer 2015), and are under the source of constant discussion regarding its ethical and methodological difficulties (Brady and O'Regan, 2009).

Another significant mixed-method evaluation study was carried out in Ireland (Dolan, Brady, O'Regan, Russell, Canavan and Forcan, 2011; Dolan, Brady, O'Regan, Brumovská, Canavan, and Forcan, 2010). Its methodology is based on the widely accepted Rhodes "mentoring process" model (Rhodes, 2005). This major RCT study was completed with semi-structured interviews led in the dialectic approach to the experimental design, arguing for the analysis of mixed data arising from the different epistemologies (Dolan et al., 2010; 2011; Brady and O'Regan, 2009). However, the depth of its qualitative methodology was limited by the semi-structured interviews designed to complete the major survey done in the positivist cause-effect approach. Moreover, Rhodes' theoretical model that provided a framework to the qualitative part of the study does not explain the internal processes in mentoring relationships, in which the relational quality features and thus the mentoring benefits are developed (Brumovská, Seidlová Málková, 2020; Brumovská, 2017).

Two widely cited meta-analytical studies on the effectiveness of formal mentoring programmes and intervention were conducted (DuBois et al., 2011, 2002). Both studies together analysed reports and research outcomes published between 1975 and 2010 (approximately one hundred and twenty in total, including seventy-three studies conducted in experimental and quasi-experimental designs). In respect to the effectiveness of the mentoring intervention, the authors concluded that gains on outcome measures for the typical mentoring programmes users were rather modest (DuBois et al., 2011). The positive impact of mentoring was identified in the areas of enhanced psychological, social, academic, and job/employment functioning and in reducing risk behaviours (Ibid).

It needs to be stressed that the positive effects and meaningfulness of implementing mentoring programmes was proven in international literature. At the same time, it needs to be emphasised that experimental and RCT designs have difficulty capturing the mentoring relational dynamics and processes and the quality of experience in these features that mediate the benefits of mentoring relationships (Brumovská and Seidlová Málková, 2010; Rhodes, 2005; Morrow and Styles, 1995). The experimental approach to mentoring evaluations is feasible for the field while using the theories of social supports and risk and resiliency as the explanation of mentoring effects. However, these theoretical frameworks and related research studies do not explore the in-depth mentoring processes that mediate mentoring benefits. As a result, the principles that mediate the benefits of youth mentoring to children and causing a positive impact of mentoring interventions on young people remain theoretically and empirically unclear in the literature to date (Brumovská, 2017; DeWit et al., 2015; Brumovská and Seidlová Málková, 2010; Thomson and Zand, 2009).

In sum, we argue that the future research on mentoring should concentrate more on the fact that mentoring is a positive experience that can support mentees' development in a positive way (Brumovská and Seidlová Málková, 2010). The focus of mentoring programmes, their evaluation and mentoring research should thus be on exploring mentoring relationships and their qualities that foster the characteristics and benefits

of natural mentoring. We understand this shift towards the qualitative interpretive perspectives in research on examining and evaluating mentoring phenomena, their experiences and perceived benefits as logical research progress in the field.

The framework of the interpretive perspective (Creswell, 2013) assumes that there is a difference between an objective reality of physical objects 'out there' - subjected to natural forces and measured with an experimental research design - and the socially constructed systems of relationships that exist between humans in society. In this worldview, socially constructed knowledge mediates the understanding of the phenomena in the social world (ibid). The researcher's task is to seek to understand and interpret social reality in terms of this socially constructed knowledge. Thus, the interpretive paradigm gives value to individuals' voices and their experiences with the given social phenomena (Smith et al., 2012).

The goal of research in this perspective is to explore the subjectivity of experiences and meanings in their historical context of people's culture and society (Creswell, 2013: 23). In other words, it seeks an understanding of people's living world and their experience with particular phenomena. It addresses the interactions between people and explores the subjective meanings of experiences to understand phenomena in their complexity (Creswell, 2013; Smith et al., 2012). The researcher thus aims to interpret people's experience of phenomena and the context that shapes those experiences, to understand what meanings the phenomena have for people. The research inquiry is generated inductively to develop theory or patterns of meaning in subjective experiences (Creswell, 2013: 23–25).

We think that mentoring should be understood as a complex social phenomenon (Brumovska, 2017) and as such it should be mainly explored as an experience of individuals and its characteristics, qualities, and perceived benefits in mentoring relationships, rather than as the outcomes of mentoring and its causal impact on children's development. The interpretive paradigm is, therefore viable for such exploration and assessment. We argue that as far as the mentoring relationship itself creates a positive and satisfying experience for its recipients - and if its

experiences, characteristics and benefits are explored as experience of mentoring as social phenomena - the outcomes expected in the causal model of experimental evaluation are inherently present as a result of this positive experience of mentoring (Brumovska and Seidlova Malkova, 2020; Brumovská, 2017).

An example of the practical use of the interpretative paradigm in research is an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, IPA (Smith et al., 2012). We understand it as an especially suitable and promising methodology for future research exploring mentoring experiences and benefits (see Brumovská, 2017). Implementing IPA methodology opens up the possibility to broaden and enhance theoretical knowledge about the essential principles of the quality of mentoring programmes, the quality of mentoring experience, and the nature of mentoring relationships itself.

The next section aims to show – on the case of research conducted on cohorts of Czech participants - how the interpretive, qualitative approach to mentoring research saturates the evaluation of the quality of mentoring relationships in formal youth mentoring interventions. The section is based on research conducted between 2004 and 2017. We try to show here how we came to an appreciation of the use of IPA methodology in the research on the efficacy of youth mentoring programmes in the Czech social-educational system.

We particularly outline the development of research methods in the studies on youth mentoring we conducted, starting with the survey questionnaires in 2003 and moving through content analysis on mentoring roles to the application of a qualitative longitudinal IPA study on mentoring experience and its characteristics and quality in 2017. We mention how we approached the research evaluation on the impact of the Czech Big Brothers Big Sisters/Pět P in 2003, assessing the survey questionnaires used by the programme as an evaluation tool at the time. The conclusions of this first study were then further developed in the two qualitative explorative studies on characteristics of mentors' approach to children in mentoring relationships (Brumovská, Seidlová Málková, 2008; Brumovská, 2007). Finally, these Czech research studies were completed with the longitudinal qualitative study on the features, quality and dynamics of formal youth mentoring relationships (Brumovská,

2017), using the interpretive phenomenological analysis (Smith et al., 2012).

3. A brief review of research conducted in the Czech mentoring intervention programme

Generally speaking, we conducted four major studies between 2004 and 2017 on the efficacy of a Czech version of the BBBS mentoring programme, called “Pět P”, (Brumovská and Málková, 2010, 2008; Brumovská, 2017, 2009, 2003²). BBBS CZ/Program Pět P was the most extensive mentoring intervention in the Czech Republic at the time our research started. Its operation was implemented in 1996 in Prague and was based on the methods of the Big Brothers Big Sisters USA programme. The BBBS CZ programme operated through approximately 20 affiliates that were part of different statutory and voluntary organisations, but mainly under Voluntary Centres (civic associations for promoting volunteering and civic engagement in society) or SVP – statutory Centres for Special Education, Support, and Care that aim to provide services to disadvantaged children and families in prevention and early intervention services. Affiliates of BBBS CZ recruited, trained, matched, and supervised voluntary mentors in line with the practices of BBBS International to develop mentoring matches. Volunteers, children and parents in BBBS CZ agreed to be involved and to support regular one-to-one mentoring meetings for at least ten months. The BBBS CZ affiliate in Prague took part in the research studies.

Mentors are volunteers who can be seen by the mentoring programme in different roles relative to the programme’s mission, aims, and objectives (Frič and Pospíšilová, 2010). The BBBS CZ affiliate in Prague trained mentors mainly as agents of change in civil society (Ibid) through their volunteering activity in the programme. The programme was based generally on the idea that a mentor is a volunteer, non-professionally and informally related to the child, and function as a friend and role model.

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Research on youth mentoring in the Czech Big Brothers Big Sisters programme in 2003 practically existed only in the studies conducted as students’ bachelor’s and master’s research dissertations at the time. The term ‘youth mentoring’ and the overview of the international research literature in the field was firstly introduced in the Czech context in the monograph called *Mentoring: Towards the professional volunteering* (Brumovská, Seidlová Málková, 2010).

Mentors dedicate time and interest to the child, spending enjoyable time together once a week and gaining good experiences and joy from their meetings. The mentors benefit from the relationship and the programme setting as well as the child, which motivates mentors to volunteer (Programme Pět P Manual for Caseworkers, 2007).

Mentors should have no particular goal in the relationship except to develop an enjoyable, friendly relationship and spend time with the child in mutually agreeable activities once a week, over at least ten months (Brumovská, Seidlová Málková, 2010). The approach of a mentor thus depended more on their personality and the perception of the child and their needs, as well as the mentor's motivation for the relationship. Mentors, in the beginning, had to find a connection with the child, which established a close mutual relationship. They had to discover their role in the relationship, which was suitable for the child's needs as well as enjoyable and satisfying for themselves so that they could stay involved long-term (Brumovská, Málková, 2008; Programme Pět P Manual for Caseworkers, 2007).

The first Czech study was conducted as a part of the bachelor research thesis assessing the viability of the survey at the time frequently used as a tool for evaluation of the BBBS mentoring programme efficacy (Programme-Based Outcome Evaluation, POE). The study aimed to explore the strengths of the Czech BBBS programme.

POE was originally developed in the USA, following the results of Tierney's (1997) RCT study and then adopted in 1999 as a method of evaluating the Czech BBBS CZ programme in translation from the English version. POE consisted of survey questionnaires to assess the changes in children mainly by mentors. There were 18 questions in three main domains (Trust, Skills, and Relationships). The survey asked mentors to assess the efficacy of their impact on mentees (Brumovská, 2003).

The study concluded that self-assessment of the effectiveness in the mentoring role, by the mentor him or herself, can be highly biased. Mentors probably tend to reflect their mentoring efficiency in a way that gives a definite meaning to their involvement (Brumovská and Seidlová

Málková, 2008; Brumovská, 2003). The study also concluded that evaluating the direct experience and perceived benefits of mentoring participants in the mentoring relationships would be a more accurate method to assess changes in children's behaviour, rather than using the questionnaires assessed by mentoring participants.

As a result, the "POE study" recommended the use of in-depth qualitative interviews with mentoring actors – mentors in particular – on the approach to children in the mentoring relationships in future research and evaluation, as a more viable method to assess the quality of youth mentoring programmes. Mentors are the actors with a crucial impact on the quality of the developing mentoring relationship that the intervention facilitates. Thus, it is the relationship and its quality that should be the subject of a mentoring evaluation (Brumovská and Seidlová Málková, 2008, 2010; Brumovská, 2003) to assess the quality and efficacy of formal youth mentoring interventions.

Following the "POE study", two explorative qualitative studies were conducted on mentors' perceived approach to children in formal youth mentoring relationships, to explore the nature of mentoring relationships and the principles of its benefits. In the first study (Brumovská, 2007), Czech and Swedish mentoring programmes were compared to contrast their operation and the experiences of mentors in two countries. The aim was to gain an international perspective on formal youth mentoring.

In the spring of 2007, 11 in-depth qualitative interviews (Kvale, 1996) were conducted with Czech (n = 6) and Swedish (n = 5) mentors, and with three mentoring caseworkers in two Swedish and one Czech mentoring programmes. The mentors participated in the programme for at least one year, were aged 21–35 years and were professional social workers or volunteers. The children were aged 9–18 years and had a range of social problems, such as loneliness, school absence, and problems with the law.

The typical Swedish mentoring programme and its operation were thus compared with the Czech BBBS programme: The Kontaktmanna Poolen with Contact Persons (CP) was chosen as a programme typical of mentoring intervention in Sweden. The mentor was a professional who

became a part of the social services network with which the mentee was involved. The programme operated as a statutory social service for socially disadvantaged youth and young offenders. Mentees were aged 13–20. They could be referred to the programme for being sentenced and have a CP compulsorily for committing a crime, or a CP was assigned to them as a support compensating their social disadvantage.

The mentors of Kontaktmanna Poolen were professional social workers and were paid a small amount for working as mentors on top of their full-time jobs. The intervention aimed to achieve concrete improvements in the youth's social problems as identified beforehand by social services. The mentoring relationship was thus oriented towards a goal of improving mentees' behaviours and was agreed with mentees and other social services at the start of the contract. The mentoring roles were rather formal and were defined clearly from the beginning to the end of the contract.

Following the analysis of the Czech and Swedish mentoring programme's operation, the same study also analysed mentors' roles in mentoring relationships, the approach styles of mentors and features of relationships that mentors developed. It also discussed mentors' dilemmas in their role. The analysis concluded (Brumovská, 2007) that regardless of the different cultural, policy, and organisational contexts of mentoring interventions, the principles and benefits of mentoring remained in the quality of experience in relationships that mentors developed with the vulnerable children and young people to support them (Ibid).

The second qualitative study conducted in the BBBS CZ programme, between 2007 and 2010, was a content analysis (Elo and Kyngas, 2007) of the records of interviews with mentors who participated monthly in group supervision meetings for mentors, organised by the BBBS CZ/Pět P programme. The researchers compiled the records of interviews with ten mentors who were present at the meetings every month over 12 months of their mentoring involvement. The interviews were led by the programme's supervisor – a clinical or child psychologist – and recorded by the programme's caseworkers.

The researcher had access to this data when volunteering for the programme in 2000–2003 as the records of supervisions were made accessible to all volunteers present at the meetings at the time and the BBBS management team supported its use for the research. In addition to the written records of interviews, the researcher observed the interviews with mentors selected for the analysis, their matches, and their progress over the 12 months, as she also participated as a volunteer in the supervision meetings.

The data were analysed using so-called content analysis (Elo and Kyngas, 2007) in themes of relationship characteristics and dynamics perceived by mentors, and according to the mentoring literature to date. The dynamics of relationships developed according to the themes common to all tracked matches (Brumovská and Seidlová Málková, 2010, 2008). In short, the relationships were tracked and analysed in the relational dynamics according to the themes that each of the relational stages addressed. In other words, the themes that mentors addressed in the supervision meetings over 12 months changed and thus defined the relational dynamics. The analysis concluded that the identified themes of each relational stage are common to all tracked mentors. As a result, the stages of mentoring relationships, and the related themes of each relational stage were identified:

Figure 1: Stages and themes in the dynamics of formal youth mentoring relationships.

Stage of the Relationship	Common Mentoring Themes
Before the match	Expectations of mentors before the first meeting.
Months 1–2	First impressions: Experiences of the first meetings. Quality of the initial connection with the child from the mentor’s perspective
Months 3–5	Getting to know each other: Questioning and defining the contents of mentoring interactions and roles; intentions to establish a mutual connection in mentoring activities; testing and negotiating the boundaries in the interactions between a mentor and the child; coping strategies on challenging

	behaviour of the child
Months 5–8	Satisfaction in relationships
After eight months	Further dynamics of relationships

All the ten relationships observed throughout the study were divided according to these common themes and the differences in mentors' experiences and approaches to these. As a result, three types of mentoring relationships, with their characteristics and dynamics over 12 months, were identified: 1. Relationships with a Friendly–Equal Approach; 2. Relationships with Dilemmas of Mentors in the Mentoring Role; 3. Relationships with Authoritative–Intentional Approach of Mentors (Brumovská and Seidlová Málková, 2010, 2008):

Relationships with a Friendly–Equal Approach: Three volunteers with Friendly–Equal approaches initially felt confident about the mentoring role and had positive expectations of the personality of the mentee and future relationships. They said they connected with their mentee quickly and thoroughly during the first meeting of the match. Following that, they developed the role of a friend with a respectful and friendly approach towards mentees. They involved themselves in activities mutually with the child and thus shared experiences of play with them. After five months of involvement, these mentors were satisfied with the bond they had developed with the children, experienced the children as non-problematic, and engaged with their behaviours. Contact was maintained on a regular basis. The relationships continued beyond the formal contract with the BBBS programme after ten months of mentoring involvement.

Relationships with Dilemmas of Mentors in the Mentoring Role: Four mentors with Dilemmas expressed doubts about their acceptance by future mentees before the meetings started. They described developing a slow initial connection with children during the first four meetings of the match. They then established two variations of the mentoring role: Firstly, mentors in the role of rescuer intended to save the child from the "evil" of the risk environment, preferably emphasizing mentees' needs regardless of their enjoyment of the mentoring meetings. Secondly, mentors in the role of observer facilitated activities but did not involve themselves in play with the child. Instead, they observed children playing

on their own. After five months of involvement, they reported that the children started to skip the meetings intentionally or unintentionally. The children's behaviour was then interpreted as unengaged. Thus, mentors had to deal with personal dissatisfaction with the role and with the nature of the bond they developed with the children. In particular, they doubted whether the children appreciated their effort and the support they tried to offer and felt dissatisfied because they did not perceive enough appreciation from them. They also had difficulty connecting with children emotionally and looked for ways to become closer. Most of these relationships terminated at the end of the formal contract after ten months of involvement. Mentors' feedback on the experience was described as doubtful on its meaning. Those who continued into the second year showed intentions to change the character of their involvement and to be more satisfied in the mentoring role.

Relationships with Authoritative–Intentional Approach of Mentors: Three mentors with the Authoritative–Intentional Approach had particular and concrete ideas about the character of the future mentees before the meetings started. They established goals to be achieved after 10 months as a result of their mentoring involvement. After the first mentoring meeting, they expressed a negative first impression on the connection with the child. In particular, they doubted if the child accepted them as a friend. They then developed the role of a strict, authoritative parent, trying to discipline mentees towards the norms they respected. The matches terminated prematurely before eight months of mentoring involvement.

In sum, the early Czech studies on the BBBS CZ/Pět P youth mentoring programmes and relationships showed the need for exploration and better in-depth understanding of the principles of mentoring in the assessment of the mentoring programme's quality and benefits. The conclusion of the studies thus naturally recommended to further explore mentoring experience, its content and its quality perceived by the mentoring participants.

As a result, following the early studies on mentoring in the BBBS CZ programme, an in-depth longitudinal qualitative tracking study was conducted in the same programme with its two affiliates in the Czech

Republic. We argued for and conceptualised mentoring as being a social phenomenon. We argued that mentoring needs to be explored as the experience of mentoring participants and their qualities and dynamics to evaluate mentoring programmes' conditions and benefits. Thus, this research study was designed in the constructivist paradigm, which considers each mentoring experience and its perceived benefits to be a valuable and legitimate outcome of mentoring intervention (Brumovská, 2017).

A constructivist worldview is manifested in a phenomenological approach to research inquiry that methodologically describes and explores a person's experiences of phenomena (Creswell, 2013; Smith et al., 2012). In particular, the phenomenological approach to interviews and the IPA that was applied to data analysis describe people's lived experiences of a particular phenomenon: *what* they experienced in respect to the phenomenon under study, and *how* they experienced it (Creswell, 2013; Smith et al., 2012). The approach particularly compares and contrasts people's experiences of phenomena. It selects and collects data from people who have different experiences of the given phenomena, to attempt to describe the "universal essence" of the phenomena (Ibid).

The study thus aimed to explore the experiences and understandings of mentoring phenomena as mentoring participants experienced it. Fieldwork and data collection took place in two affiliates of the BBBS CZ programme in the Czech Republic from 2010–2012. Eleven mentoring matches were tracked for 12 months. Children, mentors, parents and caseworkers in two BBBS CZ affiliates were interviewed on their mentoring experiences during the first month and after months four and eight of their involvement. The IPA applied to the data was conducted according to the method (Smith et al., 2012) in several hermeneutic cycles, where the data were examined, analysed, and compared. The following themes of mentors' experience were common to all 10 matches tracked over 12 months. In other words, over 12 months of mentoring involvement all mentors had in common and emphasised the following themes in their mentoring experience (Brumovská, 2017):

- 1) The initial motivation for volunteering

- 2) Perceived competence in coping with mentoring challenges
- 3) Perceived initial dynamics of mentoring relationships after the first month of involvement
- 4) Mentors' helping attitudes in the perception of the function of the mentoring role for children and perceived children's needs
- 5) Characteristics of collaboration and provided social supports in mentoring interactions
- 6) Perceived satisfaction in the mentoring role and dynamics of the relationship after 4 and 8 months of involvement
- 7) Perceived benefits of mentoring involvement

Although the themes were common to all participants, the study identified significant differences in tracked participants' understanding of the mentoring role, attitudes to mentees and mentoring style. As a result, it identified the characteristics and features of FYMRs that facilitate the benefits of mentoring and thus contribute to a child's positive development and well-being. It also identified the characteristics and features and their development in FYMRs that impose potential risks on mentees. Finally, it showed mentors' motivation for volunteering and its impact on the quality and dynamics of FYMRs (Brumovská, 2017). In particular, using the self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan and Deci, 2000, 1985; Ryan and Solky, 1996), the 10 tracked mentoring matches were divided into two categories of developmental relationship: Controlling, which induces potential risks in FYMRs insofar as it pressures the mentees to 'think, feel or behave in specific ways' (Ryan and Deci, 1985: 95) according to the expectations and preferences of the mentor; and, autonomy-supportive relationships which foster the development of mentees' authentic self through 'acknowledgement of other's perceptions, acceptance of other's feelings, and absence of attempts to control the other's experience and behaviour' (Ryan, Solky, 1996: 252).

In sum, the last referred Czech study identified controlling and autonomy-supportive formal youth mentoring relationships in the detailed features and dynamics developed over 12 months of mentoring

involvement that showed the qualities and risks of these, as well as the characteristics that predicted the resulted quality, risks and dynamics of relationships in the later stages of the relational course. The results can be used by the mentoring programmes for assessment of mentoring relationships' qualities and thus for evaluation of the benefits of mentoring programmes for children.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we aimed to show that exploring formal youth mentoring relationships by implementing the qualitative interpretive approaches is very useful in addressing currently relevant issues within the field of youth mentoring.

We presented our opinion that the interpretive research perspective in which the exploration of the experience of mentoring as social phenomena and its qualities perceived by mentoring participants is a beneficial approach to the evaluation of the quality and benefits of mentoring programmes and services. By using the brief review of studies conducted on the Czech Big Brothers Big Sisters/Pět P youth mentoring programme between 2003-2017, we aimed to show the transformation of the interest in mentoring research. The movement from studying mentoring (especially mentoring relationships) from general hypotheses testing driven perspective, to more in-depth interpretative approaches. We highly value the benefits of longitudinal designs for mentoring research - for their potential to reveal the importance of specific social (mentor-mentee) interaction characteristics for the quality of professional mentoring relationships. For current research on mentoring, we also see art-based, child-and-youth-centred participatory methods as very promising and beneficial, as these enable children and youth to express "their voice", reveal their specific contribution to the quality of mentoring relationships and describe views and experiences they live in mentoring relationships.

We hope we demonstrated that the in-depth understanding of the mentoring principles is needed in the field to assess the qualities of mentoring experiences. The shift from focusing on the outcomes of mentoring on children's behaviour to the assessment of qualities of mentoring experiences and perceived benefits opens a space to better

understand the principles of mentoring phenomena and its contribution to children's healthy development and well-being. We think that more discussion on the contents and strategies of mentoring interventions is needed to navigate actions on bridging knowledge on positive principles of natural mentoring to the praxis of social and educational services for vulnerable children and youth.

Gabriela Seidlova Malkova's work on this chapter was supported by the Institutional Support for Long-term Development of Research Organizations at Charles University, Faculty of Humanities (2019) provided by The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic.

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