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'It's good but it's not enough": the relational geographies of social policy and youth mentoring interventions

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‘It’s good but it’s not enough”: the relational geographies of social policy and youth mentoring interventions

Abstract

Developing a critical analysis of the relational and situated practices of social policy, this paper draws on an evaluation of an early intervention project in Scotland (UK) where volunteer adult mentors supported young people ‘at risk’ of offending or anti-social behaviour. Contributing to ‘enlivened’ accounts of social practice, we explore how practices of mentoring developed through the co-presence of mentor and young person in the often transitory spaces of care which characterised the ‘diversionary activities’ approach in the project. We expand the notion of the relational in social practice beyond the care-recipient dyad to include wider networks of care (families, programme workers, social institutions). The paper explores how such social interventions might both be ‘good’ for the young people involved, and yet recognise critiques that more individualised models of intervention inevitably have limitations which make them ‘not enough’ to deal with structural inequalities and disadvantages. Acknowledging the impacts of neoliberalism, we argue critical attention to diverse situated relational practices points to the excessive nature of engagement in social policy and provides scope for transformative practice where young people’s geographies can be ‘upscaled’ to connect to the realms of social policy and practice.

Keywords: mentoring; young people; relational geographies; youth justice; geographies of caring; social policy

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Introduction

This paper offers a critical analysis of the relational geographies of social policy and practice, using the example of mentoring with vulnerable young people and drawing on an evaluation of a youth mentoring project, *plusone mentoring* in Scotland (UK). Using volunteer adult mentors trained and managed through an established youth work voluntary organisation (YMCA), the project worked with young people deemed to be at risk of offending or anti-social behaviour within a multi-agency partnership model (Blazek, Brown, Smith, & van Blerk, 2011). The paper contributes to existing debates on the relational geographies of social policy in two interrelated ways.

First, it does so by illustrating the centrality of emotions in social policy and practice (Jupp 2008). This is approached less from the perspective of 'nudge' behavioural economics and the 'psychological state' (Jones, Pykett, & Whitehead, 2013), and more by drawing on Bondi's (2008) discussion of the relational theory of practice which emphasises that the interpersonal relationships and dynamics between service providers and their clients are not just contingencies but the ultimate mediums of policy delivery (Hunter, 2012). Importantly, and relating to wider debates about young people's agency in the context of care and

intergenerational relations within and outside the neoliberal mainstreams of both the Global North and South (Blazek, Smith, Lemešová, & Hricová, 2015; Evans, 2012), we focus on young people not only as 'recipients' of care (Wiles, 2011), but also as active participants in relational and situated practices such as mentoring and, consequently, policy delivery (Dickens & Lonie, 2013).

Second, the paper considers an expanded notion of relational practice in the emerging contexts of social policy and care economies. It offers a critical analysis of what may make mentoring 'good' for the young people involved, as expressed by the young person in the quotation in the paper's title. However, this young person also argues that mentoring is 'not enough', articulating a sense of the wider critiques of individualising forms of neo-liberal governance which 'responsibilise', or at times stigmatise, the individual (Pykett, 2014) while failing to address wider structural inequalities. By taking such critiques seriously, but also refusing to dismiss what is deemed 'good' by those involved in the mentoring process, we engage with a wider sense of the situatedness of social practice in broader networks of care. This requires acknowledging its constitution through embodied relations across a range of scales that exceed universalising assumptions about the effects of social policy on young people (Hörschelmann & El Refaie, 2014). We consider therefore what else contributes to challenging the 'not enough' nature of work such as this with vulnerable populations by embedding the young people as agents in the wider social and emotional geographies of their lives. Ultimately, the paper contributes to work which argues for the importance of 'enlivening' (Smith, Timbrell, Woolvin, Muirhead, & Fyfe, 2010) understandings of how social policy is enacted, attending to the "seemingly mundane acts" which "can lead to varied forms of contact and

engagement that hold the potential to nudge established patterns of control and authority and to anticipate new political acts" (Staeheli, Ehrkamp, Leitner, & Nagel, 2012, p. 630). By insisting on the need for expanded notions of relational practice, we argue that attention to the mundane and the everyday should not constrain notions of care recipients' agency, but rather be understood as situated in and co-constitutive of wider realms of social policy and practice if the 'not enough' of social care is to be challenged.

We begin by situating mentoring within a wider context of social policy theory and practice before introducing *plusone mentoring* and the methodology used in its evaluation. The paper then considers the relational and situated practices of mentoring, before arguing for the need to develop an expanded notion of the 'relational' if social policy in practice can be both 'good' and simultaneously challenge aspects which make it 'not enough'.

Youth mentoring and social policy: attending to the relational

Mentoring has become a widespread social policy measure in interventions in the lives of young people across a range of countries (du Bois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002). Deployed to promote engagement with schooling (Pryce, 2012), or informal learning or employment (Sandford, Armour, & Stanton, 2010), it is often specifically targeted at those young people experiencing social disadvantage or deemed 'at risk' (Moodie & Fisher, 2009). Many mentoring programmes originate within the voluntary or community sector, but examples of multi-agency programmes working across the state, third and (sometimes) private sectors have emerged as part of what Jupp (2013) has called the 'thickening' of social policy

interventions targeting particular population groups. As these multi-agency strategies are mobilised to develop forms of governance around the behaviours of young people, particularly those seen to be 'difficult to reach' and 'at risk', the immediate practices of mentoring are situated within wider circuits of social policy.

plusone mentoring was primarily focussed upon youth justice. Within youth justice policy, young people have been the targets of various 'early intervention' models with reviews repeatedly emphasising the efficacy of targeted preventative and 'pro-social' programs over those which seek to 'rehabilitate', particularly in the early teenage years (McAra & McVie, 2010). In the devolved administration of Scotland within the UK, 'early intervention' has been central to policies across the fields of education, social work and criminal justice under the policy known as 'GIRFEC' - 'Getting it right for every child' (Scottish Government, 2008a, 2008b). Thus the project discussed in this paper sits firmly within stated national priorities across all aspects of young people's policy, including youth justice (Croall, 2006; Scottish Government, 2009, 2013). In the youth justice arena, mentoring and 'diversion' for specific young people sit alongside broader preventative measures directed at building community capacities and utilising community wardens (Brown, 2013), as well as more 'carceral' approaches (Schliehe, 2014) such as secure care units or prison (for those over 16) within a complex arrangement of diverse criminal justice bodies and partnerships (Audit Scotland, 2011). Youth justice issues are also embedded within wider policy concerns about supporting young people, particularly those deemed marginalised or disadvantaged (Education Scotland, 2014). Early intervention and prevention approaches have tended to emphasise working across agencies and different sectors, with models of practice from the voluntary sector

also being examined as having potential, for example, to access otherwise difficult-to-reach groups, who may be much less likely to engage with statutory agencies such as the police or social work services. This overall approach continues in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill passed in February 2014 (Scottish Parliament, 2014), with its emphasis on cross-agency working. However, there have also been debates about the implications of some of its measures, particularly about the apparent universalism of having a 'named person' (such as a head-teacher) responsible for every child, not (just) those 'at risk' and debates on the sharing of information versus the rights of the child or young person to privacy and increased autonomy (Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2014).

Such practices of social policy (including youth justice) might be seen as increasingly 'diverse' (Gibson-Graham, 2008) or 'pluralised' (Milligan & Conradson, 2006) in terms of how they are delivered, but there are also other concerns about 'centralisation', while increasing evidence emerges of the potential displacement of 'soft' services from statutory agencies to the (potentially cheaper) voluntary sector in the context of cuts to public-sector funding (Bunt & Harris, 2010) and of wider crises of social care across the sector in the context of austerity (Clayton, Donovan, & Merchant, 2015). Further debates consider how such measures might stigmatise some young people and overlook others (and their needs) by stepping away from 'universalism' towards targeted provision, as youth work and youth justice fuse (Williamson, 2009) and austerity measures contest (or even undermine) the diversity of professional youth work provision (Bradford & Cullen, 2014).

However, what is often limited in these debates is a sense of the 'enlivened geographies' of such social policy. Smith et al. (2010, p. 270) argue for the need to

attend to the "situated, emotional and embodied" nature of social policy and emphasise the "social" of social policy, as well as the importance of the "more-than-social" in exploring "how the spaces of [social practice] function in and through myriad prosaic, complex, tangible and intangible practices, feelings and encounters". In this paper we argue for the need to be open to what, after Lorimer (2007), Smith et al. (2010, p. 271) discuss as the "on-going nature of 'doing' [social practice] and its 'emergent' qualities in diverse spaces which are both central to, but also excessive of, the direct spaces and places of [social practice]." Thus both temporal and wider socio-spatial aspects of the practices of care require consideration.

Such analysis helps to critically engage with the 'diverse economies' (Gibson-Graham, 2008) of practices around themes such as social care, potentially serving to "make them more real and more credible as objects of policy and activism" (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 613). From the "everyday activities in quotidian spaces" (Askins, 2015, p. 475) of a befriending project involving refugees and asylum seekers, to the "doings" of voluntary work in a drop-in centre (Conradson, 2003) or the work of family centres and resident-led community groups (Jupp, 2013), increased attention is being paid to "what (else) matters" (Horton & Kraftl, 2009) in the relational practices of care.

Thus the paper contributes to a refusal to read all such social intervention with a singular lens of neoliberalism. We instead acknowledge the complex impacts of neoliberalisation (and more recently austerity) in the ways that social policy practice is framed and reframed in diverse forms of practice, including in the devolved administration of Scotland, where the project on which this paper is based was located (Law & Mooney, 2012). At the same time, we argue that taking account

of the relational practices of the mentoring process leaves space for the excessive nature of practices of social justice (Griffiths, 2014), for other models of practice, both professional and lay, as well as for the agency of the young people themselves to emerge within the complex geographies of care which underpin these practices (Hall, 2013). At the core of such considerations are the presence and absence of emotional dimensions in the principles, design and actual performance of professional (and voluntary) work with young people (Blazek & Kraftl, 2015).

The explicitly 'relational' nature of such social policy and practice needs sustained consideration (Hunter, 2012). We therefore not only respond to Conradson's (2003, p. 1989) call for more "lively and creative accounts" of the spaces and experiences of the delivery of social services but also argue for the centrality of the relations of care to the practices of social policy. In so doing, we attend to more unexpected, more contingent notions of the effects of policy, reflecting Horton and Kraftl's (2005) argument that usefulness arises in practice. Thus the effects of policy interventions are often unpredictable and need to be evaluated as such, not just against the pre-designed aims or procedures of a policy.

In particular, by focusing on the relational nature of the mentoring process the paper recognises the "importance of valuing and respecting the knowledge and feedback provided by the recipient of care, and of recognising the complexity, emotional richness, and importance of relationship skills – however ordinary – through which care is given and received" (Bondi, 2008, p. 262). By focusing on the views of the young people as well as the mentors, we address the relative absence of research on the 'recipients' of care (Wiles, 2011), but, in line with the youth work ethos of the mentoring project outlined below, we view the young people not only

as ‘vulnerable’ recipients of care but also as agents within a relational process with their mentors and others (Dickens & Lonie, 2013). Following Bondi’s (2005) argument that the emotional should not be equated with individualised subjective experience but should instead be viewed as intersubjective, we assess the importance of looking beyond the narrow carer/care-recipient encounter (or the ‘mentor-mentee dyad’, Keller, 2005), central though this may be, to examine the situated and relational nature of the ‘different kinds of “doings”’ and ‘everyday interactions, practices and feelings’ (Jupp, 2008, p. 341) which may be critical in developing the wider progressive outcomes of such models of social practice for the young people involved. The socio-material geographies of young people’s lives and their relationships to their families, ‘communities’, institutional support and links from mentoring to broader multi-agency interventions all potentially impact on whether mentoring can move beyond being ‘good but […] not enough’ to enabling the creation of networks which function as ‘agents of care’ (Gibson-Graham, 2008), through and beyond young people’s embodied subjectivities.

Focus of the research: *plusone mentoring*

plusone mentoring launched in September 2009 in three pilot areas in Scotland and aimed to develop an early intervention approach by offering mentoring to young people identified as being at high risk of offending or anti-social behaviour, using volunteer adult mentors trained and managed through local YMCA centres and working in a multi-agency partnership. The Violence Reduction Unit of the Scottish Police (VRU) and the three local authorities in which the project was introduced provided two years of funding from September 2009. The project’s Oversight Group

consisted of representatives of the VRU, the Association of Directors of Social Work in Scotland and YMCA Scotland. This paper draws upon the Scottish Government funded evaluation of the first phase of the project, which the authors conducted from January to May 2011.

Young people (mainly aged 8-14) considered at high risk in relation to a number of factors (such as parenting difficulties, existing hostile or violent behaviour, criminal or anti-social behaviour, and substance misuse) were referred to the project by local multi-agency panels, consisting of representatives of the police, social work, education, community mental health teams and others. Young people were offered one-on-one mentoring by volunteers, supervised and supported by local YMCA-based project managers. Participation by young people and their families was entirely voluntary. If they agreed, the young person was matched with an adult volunteer mentor who then met them for one session per week. Mentors were trained by the YMCA in the youth work ethos of the project.

The ethos of the project emphasised a young person-centred youth work approach drawing on common principles such as "young people choose to participate; the work builds from where young people are and the young person and youth worker are partners in the learning process" (Education Scotland, 2014, p. 4). The project stressed the need to offer long-term commitment to the young person over a time-scale of a year or more (addressing critiques about the short-term nature of many interventions; Judge, 2015) and the aim was ultimately to enable the young person to become independent of the mentoring process.

Between October 2009 and March 2011 some ninety-six referrals had been made to the project across the three areas. Of these, forty-three young people were

actively mentored at the time of the field work for the evaluation. Others were waiting to be 'matched' with a mentor. Some were no longer involved due to moving away or into foster care. Some referrals were deemed inappropriate for *plusone mentoring* and were referred to other agencies and in thirteen cases the young people or their families declined the offer of mentoring. During the same period, the project trained some eighty volunteer mentors, not all of whom had remained in the project or been successfully matched with a mentee.

As Horton and Kraftl (2009) note, evaluations of such social policy practice typically operate on a tight time-scale and are focused on a particular output, namely the 'report'. This was the case in this research with the report being produced to a deadline determined by the need for the project organisers to be able to lobby for continued funding (Blazek et al., 2011; YMCA Scotland, 2011)[1]. Given this, scope for more hybrid practice between academic research, policy and practice, for example through longer-term collaborative actions was limited (Smith et al., 2010). Nevertheless, we argue there are opportunities for wider reflection on the social practices of youth mentoring in this kind of project and in critical discussion of the possibilities and challenges of such work with 'at risk' young people.

Methodology

Evaluation of the project utilised a mixed methodology that sought to put the young people's perspectives at the centre of the research (Barker, 2008; van Blerk & Kesby, 2009). We conducted fifteen semi-structured interviews with young people. These were largely undertaken in informal settings, often where the young person would normally have been mentored. The participants were recruited by the project

managers, after an initial discussion with the research team about the sampling strategy. They were chosen to represent the diversity of experiences within the programme, including duration of, and reasons for, participation, gender, age, family situation, scope and goals of mentoring, and the history of involvement. Along with the interviews, we reviewed individual files of all young people participating in the programme to ensure that the sample provided saturated data. Key themes of these interviews included young people's experiences of the programme, the relationship with their mentor, their perceptions of being referred to the programme and of the impact of mentoring. Similar themes were explored in twenty semi-structured interviews with adult volunteer mentors, alongside questions of their previous experience of working with young people, their motivations and experiences of working with the young person in *plusone mentoring*, and their wider views on the programme. Programme managers recruited the mentors, recruiting initially mentors to the young people who undertook interviews. The invitation was then extended to others, as time and availability was often a problem for the volunteers. We further undertook interviews with the three programme managers, as well as with all three Oversight Group members and members of the local Referral Groups. Relevant documentation was also reviewed. This included referral forms for the young people, reports of mentoring sessions, training materials for mentors and the policy materials from local Referral Groups. While the overall evaluation explored a range of themes, such as the effectiveness of multi-agency approaches to youth justice and the role of the third sector and the development of new models of social policy delivery using volunteers to work with 'hard to reach' groups, the focus in this paper is primarily on mentoring as a relational and situated process.

Research for the evaluation received ethical clearance from the University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee and was developed in accordance with ethical guidelines for working with young people (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). We sought informed consent from all participants in the research with particular efforts being made to create age-appropriate information for the young people and their families about what was involved, why their views were important, why they might or might not wish to participate, assurances about anonymity and confidentiality, and emphasis that their participation would be entirely voluntary. The identities of the three pilot areas for the project were well known, being publicised in p*lusone mentoring's* own information. Given the relatively small numbers of young people and mentors involved in each area, no mentors or young people have been referred to here using any details that would allow them to be identified individually, which means that some potentially useful contextual material (for example the age or gender of the young person) is necessarily omitted.

'She is here for me': enlivening the mentoring relationship

plusone mentoring utilised a youth work approach whereby the volunteer mentors were trained to develop a relationship based on a partnership with the young person they were mentoring, on the young person's voluntary participation, their progressive empowerment and on an informal and friendly atmosphere in the mentoring process. The training pack for mentors identified three phases of mentoring:

'The beginning: developing rapport and building trust';

'Developing the relationship: working together to reach goals';

'Ending, re-defining and evaluating'.

(plusone mentoring, mentor training pack)

Emotional aspects of the process ('rapport', 'trust'), the 'relationship' of mentoring, and the process of mentoring were all emphasised, as was the idea of the mentoring relationship being one with a purpose ('goals') – or as Pryce and Keller (2012, p. 245) call it a "systemic and contextually based intervention". Getting the starting point of the relationship right was deemed central by local Programme Managers who talked of the importance of 'matching' young people with 'suitable' mentors. The exact nature of this matching process was never quite defined. Issues such as age, gender and background were included, but not in any strict form of demographic matching. Rather other aspects were deemed significant for whether the mentor and the young person would 'get on' including interests and other less defined dimensions. This echoes findings by Pryce (2012, p. 18) who argues that "flexibility, creativity and attention to youth needs" may be more significant than narrow demographic similarities in developing effective mentoring relationships. Emphasis was placed on the need to develop the relationship in the first few weeks and both mentors and young people talked about an initial 'breakthrough' as the relationship began to evolve.

After this initial phase, the mentoring process was then designed, using an informal and friendly atmosphere, to help the young person be able to identify goals for themselves and to address some practical ways the young person and the mentor might 'work together' to achieve them. Interviews with the young people showed that despite formal definitions of mentoring as a 'systemic intervention' (Keller, 2005) and the multi-agency structures through which they were referred to the

project, few talked in any explicit way about the programme as an 'intervention' scheme. Family members mentioned this in some cases, but the young people instead talked about their mentors 'helping them', perhaps reflecting the emphasis on informality and friendliness, mentioning aspects such as emotional problems, social relationships or educational issues.

In some cases young people drew comparisons between their mentors and their experiences of other professionals, such as their social workers:

> *'She [my mentor] is here for me as is [my social worker]' (Interview with young person).*

However, when asked about the particular roles of their mentors, young people most commonly highlighted the non-judgemental attitude and unconditional support that mentors offered:

> *'I can tell her anything, really, when I have problems, but also when I am fine, and she will listen and take it' (Interview with young person).*

At the same time mentors were regarded as different from parents or other adult family members and the young people sometimes referred to them as 'friends'. Milne's (2012) review of a range of mentoring and befriending projects notes that friendship is indeed a key way in which young people in such schemes understand the relationship in mentoring (also see Philip, King, & Shucksmith, 2004), while Askins (2015) notes how adults engaged in a 'befriending' scheme very quickly moved towards using the term of 'friends' rather than 'befrienders' to describe their relationship. At a broader conceptual level, the affinities between mentoring and friendship and their role in implementing the wider policy objectives of the programme resonate with what Bunnell, Yeah, Peake, Skelton, and Smith (2012, p.

490) identified as the role of friendship in the '(re)production of social ordering', although not so much by contesting and reinforcing socio-economic difference, as they suggest, as by 'enlivening' wider policy imperatives.

Yet the young people were clearly aware that the relationship with their mentor was not the same as other friendships. Indeed for some young people the difference between their mentor and their other friends was something they valued:

> *'It's different. He's an adult. He knows things my pals don't. So he can tell me things my pals wouldn't have heard about' (Interview with young person).*

The sense of the mentor providing reliable and trustworthy support was significant. This was particularly the case since a number of the young people stated that they had few friends and/or felt social or emotional support was missing in their home life, and given the wider vulnerabilities affecting the young people and which were often key factors in their referral to the project. Of particular significance was the specifically intergenerational dimension of the mentoring project (cf. Moodie & Fisher, 2009).

Thus in their slightly uncertain descriptions we see the young people trying to define the mentoring relationship - as one that was friendly, supportive, a listening ear; but also one that offered something different to their other peers and friends, due to the mentors being 'mature' people who could 'provide support'. Bowlby (2011, p. 607) defines friendship as "a voluntary relationship between two or more people, which can be severed at will by any party". In that sense, the mentoring relationship could be defined as one of friendship as both the young person and the mentor participated voluntarily, but the notion of severing the link at any time, while possible (and it indeed had happened to some mentoring partnerships) was

mediated by a prior commitment by the volunteer mentor to be willing to undertake mentoring for normally at least twelve months. The longer term and continuous nature of the intended process had also been explained to the young people and their families at the outset. Thus the sense of trying to find a suitable way to describe the relationship with the mentor – like a social worker, like a friend, but an adult and not like their peers – is perhaps an accurate description of the distinctive and negotiated nature of the relationship offered by mentoring for the young people.

We might also argue that, unlike the perhaps less explicitly discussed issues of uneven power relations present in contexts such as family or friendship-based caring (Bowlby, 2011), as well as in other forms of care work (Bondi, 2008), the training for volunteer mentors in this project specifically addressed the distinction of the adult-child interaction involved and the need for mentors and other programme workers to work sensitively and carefully with the client group of the project. Thus while a number of studies suggest older young people can and do form 'natural' friendships with adult befrienders/mentors (Philip et al., 2004), there was a clear awareness among the young people and the mentors in this project, which was reinforced in the mentor training and in the on-going close support and supervision by local programme managers, of the need for adherence to child protection practices and to appropriate forms of conduct with the young people.

Nevertheless, for the young people themselves, key elements in the mentoring relationships were what might be seen as basic aspects of friendship and support ('breaking the ice' or 'sharing a laugh'). There was also a development of attentiveness among the mentors who discussed how (apparently) small, often

embodied, moments (the young person looking them in the eye as they talked, or showing signs of increased personal care, such as having brushed their teeth) might indicate change and development for the young person:

> *'You wouldn't believe if you saw him a few months ago. He would just stare at the wall. He still doesn't talk much now, but he will reply and [he and his mentor] get on very well' (Discussion with a local project manager about a young person).*

These might in turn, over a longer time, produce increased resilience for the young person and provide resources for their future. However, there was also a realistic understanding by mentors of the need for sustained engagement and 'patience' in mentoring:

> *Interviewer:* *Can anyone be a mentor?*
>
> *Mentor:* *Oh yes. But not everyone can be a good mentor.*
>
> *Interviewer:* *So what makes a good mentor?*
>
> *Mentor:* *You need to be patient. You need to be committed. You cannot judge but must try to understand instead … That's how you can make a difference with the young person.*

Thus the 'on-going' nature of mentoring operated in and through distinctive temporalities where patience, long-term commitment, and the possibilities of small changes intersected with the structured weekly sessions of the mentoring. Some of the changes in young people's lives were almost imperceptible – small changes in behaviour or embodied practices of things like communication or personal care that might go unnoticed otherwise. In other cases the change was more noticeable either

to the young people themselves or, indirectly, via comments they received from others around them:

Young person: *I get in to fights much less now. I've learned to avoid them.*

Interviewer: *Did someone else, for instance your teachers, notice this too?*

Young person: *Oh yeah, they did. They also told my mum. That's what she said to me.*

Thus we see evidence of "the remarkable and the unremarkable" (Meth, 2008, p. 41) in the mentoring relationship: the trust of engaging with a new, unknown adult for the young people, the efforts and attentiveness of the mentors in seeing how the young person might be developing, and the tentative attempts of the young people to try to explain the nature of the relationship with their mentor. All indicate the ways in which the mentoring relationship was a core element to how the social policy 'intervention' might be delivered and that these approaches were both intergenerational in their nature and involved distinctive temporalities. But these relational aspects should not be seen in isolation as practical help and diverse situated practices in a range of spaces were also central to the mentoring process.

'Away from home': situating the practices of mentoring

Central to the process of building a supportive mentoring relationship in the model of change adopted by this and other mentoring projects was an emphasis on the practical and active nature of mentoring, engaging young people in what youth

justice approaches term ‘diversionary activities’ (McAra & McVie, 2010) and what others might conceive through spatial, temporal and practical lenses as informal education (Mills & Kraftl, 2014). Mentors were given clear guidance that they were not qualified to offer behavioural counselling or other therapeutic roles. Rather changes in emotional, behavioural and social skills were to be developed through practical approaches and embodied experience where the mentoring relationship was at the centre of a number of spaces and networks of support for the young people. In most cases the mentoring operated neither in the YMCA centres nor the young person’s home space. Rather mentoring happened in other sites and spaces (football pitches, cafes, parks, leisure spaces), usually chosen by the young person. Thus they often involved experience of spaces that the young person might already know but this was a different to a simple leisure experience as the mentoring created informal “transitory spaces of care” (Johnsen, Cloke, & May, 2005). The relational process of mentoring drew such sites and spaces into the emotional work of the project, using them as sites of ‘co-presence’ in which different practical activities could take place while the face-to-face, embodied meetings made possible the communication which was important for the mentoring to develop.

Discussing the significance of co-presence, Bowlby (2011, p. 612) emphasises how “getting together” provides “an opportunity to share the embodied experience of a place or an event – eating out together, going to a film, watching a sporting event, playing a game together – these shared experiences are then used as part of the material through which the friendship is continued”. For the young people in the mentoring project, such co-presence in a variety of spaces offered opportunities for the care work of the project to develop. Thus the ‘unremarkable’ places (Meth,

2008) (cafes, shopping centres, sports grounds) acted, paradoxically due to their ordinariness, as an 'alternative milieu' (Longhurst, 2013) for the mentoring process by being geographically embedded in young people's relatively fixed everyday spatialities and yet fostering (a range of) novel experiences because of the mentor's presence and interaction. These places together with "seemingly mundane acts" (Staeheli et al., 2012, p. 630) of playing football, going for a walk, or visiting somewhere were central to the practical interventions of the project. Unlike in Longhurst's (2013) holistic focus on a range of factors (economy, culture, spirituality), the alternativeness of places in this context was dynamic, temporary and relationally contingent upon the interactive presence of the mentor and the inter-subjective relations that occurred both within and beyond them.

For many of the young people, these were tied to particular emotional geographies of mentoring. For several of the young people, getting away from home or out of their normal surroundings was precisely what they felt was beneficial in such activities:

Interviewer: *What is your favourite memory of being with your mentor?*

Young person: *We went for a day trip with others from YMCA.*

Interviewer: *Why this one?*

Young person: *Because I was away from home.*

Given the high incidence of chaotic or problematic family circumstances among the assessed risk factors that initially led to the young people being referred to the project, many of the young people viewed being out of their everyday spaces

positively. On a practical level, being involved with their mentor was also a key means for young people to access activities and spaces that they might otherwise find inaccessible. For some this was due to what they saw as the absence of opportunities for leisure time activities in their communities, meaning the activities with their mentor were their only options. Others were aware of activities or facilities in their area but felt unable to access them due to lack of confidence, lack of friends to go with them, tight family finances, or limited family support in taking them to activities (bearing in mind all of the young people were 14 years old or younger).

Those young people who most valued the activities that they undertook with the mentors as a way of counteracting the shortage of opportunities, while appreciating what was on offer, were also more likely to indicate they would prefer more frequent mentoring meetings than the one session provided per week (in other words the sessions were literally 'not enough' for some young people). When the possibility of more regular sessions was discussed with mentors, however, it was clear that most felt their commitment to one session a week over a long time period was as much as they were willing or able to provide, meaning there was a potential mismatch between young people's wishes and the limitations of how much time volunteers were prepared or able to give. As we discuss later, however, some mentors were involved well beyond single sessions.

Asking for more frequent meetings was less common amongst those young people who placed greater value on the chance their weekly meetings offered to talk about their problems or even look for ways of dealing with them, rather than on the activities per se. All of the young people reported some value in the activities they

undertook, but there was also a sense from some that, while they saw benefits, they also recognised the limitations of the scheme:

> *'I am aware of my problem …But when I am in our neighbourhood, I will do these things again [referring to anti-social behaviour] because there is nothing else you can do there, nowhere to go… When I'm with [my mentor] it's good … but it's not enough' (Interview with young person).*

This young person articulates clearly what is also a more general critique of mentoring and other interventions focused primarily on the individual. While young people may be removed temporarily from their everyday environment during the mentoring process, wider structural problems such as poor public service provision and the conditions which lead to anti-social behaviour, for example, remain unaffected. Such critical awareness of the limitations of the process can perhaps lead us too easily to dismiss the potential value of such work. Yet, as this section and the previous one have shown, there was much about the situated relational practice of the project which the young people felt was indeed 'good'. At the same time, the next section extends the focus beyond the 'mentor-mentee dyad' (Keller, 2005), central though this may be, to examine how an expansive sense of the 'relational' which focuses on wider social and institutional relationships and the transformative potential of such encounters might offer scope to address the 'not enough' of this young person's critique.

Extending the 'relational' beyond the mentor-mentee dyad

Recognising wider networks of care is important for understanding the situatedness of practices of care in a wider relational field. Keller (2005) argues successful

mentoring attends not only to the immediate young person-mentor 'dyad', but also to multiple relations between young person, mentor, parent/guardian and 'case worker' (equivalent to the programme manager) as well as to the wider context of the programme and the community (cf. Bowlby 2011). The following quotation indicates the role of family and project managers in structuring the young person's involvement in mentoring:

Interviewer:	*So what did you expect from mentoring when you signed up?*
Young person:	*I don't know. I didn't think about that. My **mum** told me about it but I didn't know what to expect.*
Interviewer:	*So was it your **mum's** idea to take part rather than yours?*
Young person:	*Yeah, I guess so…*
Interviewer:	*Weren't you nervous about being with someone new?*
Young person:	*Yeah, at the beginning, but **[the Programme Manager]** came to our house and explained. And it went ok, from the first meeting. (Emphasis added).*

In the case of p*lusone mentoring*, there was evidence that everyday management of the project being situated in local YMCA centres made some difference to whether the families of the young people referred to the project were open to them taking part. When compared to their reported negative experiences of some statutory agencies (police, schools or social work, for example), for some families the YMCA was seen as providing opportunities for young people, rather than as being an agency which could apply sanctions to the young people and their families (although

such views varied considerably). The role of local (paid) project managers was central to facilitating and maintaining the mentoring process. Developing and sustaining a relationship with the families of the young people in order to facilitate the young person's on-going involvement in mentoring required repeated efforts, particularly since some aspects of 'parenting difficulties' were themselves the factor with the highest average 'risk' in the assessments used for referral to the project (Blazek et al., 2011). Local project managers and mentors reported having to remind families regularly of the mentoring sessions and supporting young people in being able to attend.

It is important also, despite the mentoring taking place outside the home, to recognise that the young people's families were a key factor in the mentoring dynamics. In some cases, it was through the contrasting experience of mentoring and family life, but in others, it was through different juxtapositions of family relationships and the mentoring experience. For instance one young person described "learning how to talk to [their] mother", a frequent topic of conversations with their mentor, as the key thing they took from the programme, emphasising the importance of their mentoring participation because of its impact on their family life. The mentoring experience also indirectly impacted on the family landscapes of the young people, such as when the younger sister of one of the young people participating in the project asked for a mentor for herself, and threatened that her behaviour would deteriorate if she did not get one. Stories such as these illustrate that mentoring affected young people and their relationships far beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries of mentoring activities (with similar evidence given by one of the school managers in the area who declared that, far from involvement in the

project causing any kind of stigma for the young people, in fact other pupils in the school were jealous of their peers' participation).

Thus paying attention to an expanded sense of the relational (to parents/guardians, siblings, peers, school and so on, as well as to the structures of the project itself) demonstrates how mentoring might be supported, or conversely undermined, by diverse institutional and situational factors. In this sense, clearer distinctions emerge between the relations of care in 'friendship' and 'mentoring', even though aspects of friendship might be present in mentoring. Bowlby (2011, p. 607) argues "the care involved in friendship is 'informal' care: that is care that is not formally organised and is normally provided without payment". Mentoring fits some aspects of this definition, being provided without pay, for example, but it is 'formally' organised through a whole structure of referrals, screening and training of mentors, on-going support from programme managers, broader aims of the programme providers and the statutory funders, and, ultimately, national-scale frameworks of youth justice and child protection. Thus there is scope for future consideration of how young people's geographies in such projects might be 'upscaled' to consider how schemes such as this 'implicate' young people within wider political structures and relations (Hopkins & Alexander, 2010), a topic we discuss further in the conclusion. Nevertheless, it is also possible to argue that Keller's (2005, p. 169) model of mentoring involving the "interdependent network of relationships established between mentor, child, parent/guardian and caseworker against the backdrop of agency policies and procedures", significant though this may be, still lacks a strong sense of the emotional and social geographies involved in the process. In doing so, attention needs to focus not only on the young person themselves (their

behaviour, for example) but also on how the mentoring process may act to mediate and facilitate relations well beyond the mentoring process itself.

Evidence from the referral process, mentors, programme managers and interviews with the young people themselves indicated that many of the young people who were referred struggled in everyday social relationships, including family, school and community, as well as relationships with other professionals and statutory agencies. Thus a key role for mentors, alongside establishing a relationship and undertaking activities with the young person, was to help with practical advice and efforts to mediate between the young person and other institutions or groups. Practical support included information and advice from the mentor, resulting, for example, in one young person accessing vocational training, another beginning to attend college (facilitated by the mentor who accompanied this young person every morning on their way to the college in the first few weeks), and one who was re-admitted to a physical fitness programme with the help of their mentor's intervention, after being expelled from it. Mentors and programme managers also mediated and networked with other institutions such as a young person's school after they had been expelled, or by accompanying the young person to school after they had dropped out due to being bullied, or helping a young person wrongly accused of antisocial behaviour in his community by his peers in order to develop a way to counteract the accusations. In this context, the role of the mentor (and programme manager) as being someone with a 'formal' position in relation to the young person could be key, as could be the reputation and position of the YMCA within the local multi-agency partnerships:

'It was clear that he needs to have a regular activity in order to keep him away from his troubles and I guessed that he was very good in sports so I asked if he did not want to join a local club. He quickly changed the theme so I approached again and finally he told me that he was there some time ago but they expelled him because of behaviour. I suggested he ask them to take him back and finally he agreed… When I came to the club, it was important that I said that I'm from YMCA so they gave him another chance seeing that there are other things behind [his behaviour]' (Interview with mentor).

Thus helping the young person to make wider linkages beyond the immediate activities of the mentoring sessions was crucial to the young people involved, often dealing directly with issues such as exclusion from/ non-participation in education, or with their behaviour. In this way, aspects of the mentoring programme explicitly recognised the need to work to facilitate connections and engagements between the young person and a range of spaces and activities beyond the immediate 'transitory' spaces of mentoring.

One further aspect of the mentoring process involves considering mentoring not only as characterised by 'asymmetric' relationships (Korf, 2007), in which the adult mentor provided care and the young person was its recipient – although the power relations of mentoring and other forms of care need to be kept clearly in mind (Bondi, 2008) – but also as being a process which might be in some ways transformative for the volunteer mentors as they engaged in their unpaid work with the young people. This reflects Wiles' (2011, p. 573) argument that recipients of care might not only be figured as 'vulnerable' in the sense of "fragility or weakness" but also as active agents within care relationships - the young person, as the model of

change for *plusone mentoring* emphasised, was to be an active participant in the process of mentoring. Thus the relationship of caring might have impacts for the carer as well as the cared-for.

By training and supporting volunteer adult mentors, the project sought explicitly to 'build community capacity'. Two main motivations emerged among the volunteers for participating. Some volunteers explicitly sought experience to equip them for future career development in fields such as social work, education or community and youth work. Thus in thinking about the often complex temporal and social geographies which make up the 'diverse economies' (Gibson-Graham, 2008) of work with (vulnerable) young people, we can see that skills, experience and understanding developed within mentoring might go on to inform future practice elsewhere. Motivations among other volunteers centred on ideas of altruism or a commitment to social justice, usually phrased as 'giving something back' or 'doing something for the young people'. Included in this group were volunteers who had benefited from similar services (or wished they had) in the past. Across all mentors, however, there was evidence not only that they entered the mentoring experience with particular motivations, in some cases relatively strategic ones about building their own human capital, but that their experience of training and of the mentoring process had developed their understanding of and capacity to work with young people at risk and that they too had gained from their engagement (Roberts & Devine, 2004):

> *'I have learned so much about people, young people particularly, I think in a more complex way what they must live through. It is something that my course would not teach me' (Interview with mentor).*

'I think I began to see better what some young people experience and especially how incredibly difficult some of those things they encounter are. It's something I have not experienced myself, something I'm not sure how I would've responded to' (Interview with mentor).

Thus, while it is clear that care-giving may indeed "create asymmetric relations ... because the giving self feels compassion and is active, while the receiving other is pitied and thus passive" (Korf, 2007, p. 370), it is perhaps possible to consider how the experience may also be one which may be transformative in some ways for the adult volunteers and not (only) for the young people. It would be over-stated to suggest a parallel between mentoring and the kinds of 'reciprocal' caring which Bowlby (2011, p. 607) argues is present in friendship, but we might tentatively suggest possibilities for the 'transformative politics of encounter' (Askins, 2015) involved in mentoring to effect changes not just for the young people but for other participants in the mentoring process as they engage as 'agents of care' in these kinds of projects (Gibson-Graham, 2008).

There are parallels here to questions raised by Matejskova and Leitner (2011) about the real challenges in 'scaling up' changes in local or interpersonal encounters (in their case in relation to intercultural encounters around ethnicity) to wider social processes, though Brown's (2013) study of community wardens indicates that changing attitudes towards young people in their local communities is possible. Yet, questions about how such capacity builds into longer term change remain both for the young people and for the volunteers, as do issues about the scale and location of the 'community' in which capacity has been built, particularly since there was a

deliberate approach not to match mentors with young people from their own local neighbourhood.

Conclusion

In taking the 'good […] but not enough' claims of the title seriously, this paper makes a number of key contributions to wider debates on the 'enlivened' geographies of caring and social policy interventions (Smith et al., 2010). The need to focus on nuanced analysis of the relationality of such practices is central to our arguments. First, our attention to the situated relationality (Bondi, 2008) of such interventions with vulnerable young people serves as a call to take seriously the significance of emotions (Jupp 2008), "seemingly mundane" practices (Staeheli et al., 2012, p. 630) and small changes in their lives. Foregrounding the relational nature of such actions – and aspects such as their interpersonal (and in this case intergenerational), temporal and spatial characteristics – serves to create an expanded sense of the 'doings' of social policy and how it might explicitly operate through relational practice. It also points to the (albeit tentative) potential of transformative encounters to develop whereby relations of care are enacted in ways which do not (solely) work through asymmetrical relations of caring (Korf, 2007) but rather where the young person is positioned as an active participant in the mentoring relationship and where the skills and understandings of the mentors might also be developed through the process (Dickens & Lonie, 2013). By focusing on the complex negotiation of the mentoring relationship over a sustained period and on the spatial practices through which mentoring operated - being away from home, working through the transitory spaces of co-presence (Bowlby, 2011; Johnsen et al., 2005) – we can

suggest that much of how mentoring and other such caring relationships might have effect is through a range of both 'remarkable and unremarkable' practices (Meth, 2008) as relational spaces are created and experienced. The centrality of situated relational practices as the ultimate media for policy delivery, rather than as contingencies (Bondi, 2008), together with the acknowledgement that usefulness arises in practice (Horton & Kraftl, 2005) and thereby produces unpredictable outcomes from policy interventions, means that evaluations of projects such as this need to focus on these aspects of policy-in-practice as much as on 'hard' outcomes.

However, we also argue for the need to consider the 'relational' in social policy in a broader sense than the immediate mentoring relationship if we are to address what might make mentoring-type interventions 'not enough' and to consider the prospect of 'upscaling' young people's everyday geographies and reconnecting them with the realms of social policy and practice. Building on Bondi's (2005) argument against equating the emotional with individualised experience and Keller's (2005) call to look beyond the 'mentor-mentee dyad', the paper considers how relations with family and programme managers, as well as with other agencies, might serve to facilitate or limit the impacts of the project. It is also clear that the relational spaces of safety, trust and support developed within mentoring can have key impacts in providing alternatives to the young people's everyday lives and in mediating their (re)connection with other social spaces and institutions (school or college, leisure activities, their local communities). Thus the paper takes the expansively defined relational dimension of mentoring seriously while also insisting on its wider situatedness in often challenging, sometimes enabling institutional and social geographies (Pykett, 2014). Our approach to the relational thus not only insists

on the interpersonal, temporal and spatial dimensions in the doing of social practice but also on an expansive sense of relationality. In so doing, it begins to address the need identified by Lorimer (2007) and Smith et al. (2010) to "bridge the gap" between attention to the personal and immediate practices of social policy and "wider political agendas" of the state, though challenges remain.

Echoing Kraftl and Blazek's (2015) concerns, our paper shows that attending closely to young people's individual experiences still entails the risk of either decontextualizing them ("it's good") or seeing them as "the prompt for [only] a particular policy or practical intervention" (Kraftl & Blazek, 2015, p. 297), where "not enough" signifies the lack of focus on wider relational geographies of young people's lives. Kraftl and Blazek (2015) suggest that reconnecting young people's lives with the realm of social policy requires a shift from considering young people's lives as outcomes of interventions to seeing them as co-constructing such professional practice in a relational way. This shift has to involve recognising young people's own agency but also the variety of interrelated agents co-producing spaces of childhood through social policy and practice, an argument our paper exemplifies but also extends. *plusone mentoring* illustrated some possibilities for moving beyond hierarchical relationships between 'vulnerable' child and 'care-giving' adult by adopting a consciously 'youth work' approach (albeit situated within an explicitly youth justice agenda) which emphasised the role of the mentor in supporting the young person in achieving their *own* goals. Additionally, we argue that a relational approach allows us to examine the efforts and experiences of the diverse participants in such models of social policy to develop 'good' outcomes *as well as* strategies which try to address what might be 'not enough' about their practices

without them being discounted as being incorporated into an all-encompassing neoliberalising state.

Ultimately, this helps to extend our understandings of young people's individual experiences within the complex landscapes of social policy implementation. Here, the project was clearly devised using the monetary perspective of cost-effectiveness through involving the third sector and (unpaid) volunteers, and a financial analysis (of social return on investment) was an important part of the project's subsequent promotion towards the authorities and funders (cf. Luke, Barraket, and Eversole, 2013). The idea of involving local communities in tackling issues previously addressed by statutory agencies also resonates with the direction of the UK government's ongoing programme of austerity and individualisation (Hamnett, 2014), although one might also point to some aspects of different political discourse in the devolved administration in Scotland. Yet, the programme declared itself to be, and was viewed by other institutional partners, as a complementary and distinctive service rather than a replacement of existing provisions. As importantly, it evolved in a close partnership with the police, schools, social workers and other agencies as well as with individual practitioners. The partnership was not just at the level of information exchange but also through situated interactions during the mentoring process. As the practices and outcomes of policy are often 'excessive' compared to the singular narratives of neoliberalism (Griffiths, 2014), our findings are suggestive of a parallel with the 'diverse economies' approach from Gibson-Graham (2008) who suggest the need to "read for difference" in order to make the critical intervention of claiming space for a diversity

of practices within and beyond the dominant policy discourses about outcomes, methods and resources (cf. Hall, 2013).

Nevertheless, it is vital to take the 'not enough' of the title seriously and to attend to the real challenges which young people face, despite (some would argue because of) the targeted support of policies such as early intervention around risks of anti-social behaviour and crime. We must acknowledge the real limitations of such programmes in relation to wider structural inequalities in availability of and access to facilities by young people, the on-going (and often intensifying) impacts of deprivation and austerity in affecting this, and the constant need to examine the power relations which underpin and shape interventions in the lives of young people. Taking the social geographies of such interventions seriously means there is a need to assess more critically, and to develop more effective research on, aspects such as where 'community capacity' is being developed and what effects it might have, or how young people might realistically be able to maintain connections with the sites, spaces and institutions made accessible through the mentoring process once the mentoring process has ended. Consideration of diverse models of practice with young people that would suit their individual circumstances and backgrounds, such as a more action-centred praxis rooted in communities but reaching beyond them (Blazek et al., 2015), might offer ways to build young people's capacity to develop *collective* responses – with other young people, professionals, volunteers – to the limitations and opportunities in their local environment, something that was perhaps less central in the *plusone mentoring* project. Whatever models are adopted, however, the relational and situated nature of the practice of social policy should remain central.

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[1] The evaluation was largely 'positive' regarding the outcomes and indicators addressed by the scope of the programme. The YMCA used it in negotiations to extend and expand the programme and as of 2015 it operates in ten areas of Scotland. This paper offers scope for more detailed discussion of a number of the limitations or challenges raised in the evaluation report and for wider reflection on the relational geographies of social policy in practice.