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Engagement mentoring for 'disaffected' youth:

a new model of mentoring for social inclusion

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Abstract

This article presents a critical analysis of mentoring for social inclusion. It traces its dramatic international expansion as a tool of education policies in the 1990s, and identifies a new model: 'engagement mentoring', which seeks to re-engage 'disaffected' young people with the formal labour market, and to engage their commitment to dominant interests through shaping their dispositions in line with 'employability'. Mentors are treated as vehicles for these objectives, their dispositions also subject to transformation according to gendered stereotypes of care. The model is illustrated by a case study of engagement mentoring, and feminist readings of Bourdieu and Marx are used to relocate it within the socio-economic context from which it is usually disembedded. The paper concludes that engagement mentoring constructs the habitus of both mentor and mentee as a raw material subjected to an emotional labour process.

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Introduction

Mentoring is the 'in' thing. Over the last 20 years, it has become a major feature of initial education and continuing professional development in contexts ranging from business management to teaching. We have also, more recently, seen a spectacular rise in its popularity with policy makers as an intervention with socially excluded young people in schools and in post-compulsory education and training (PCET). This is evident not only in the UK, but also internationally.

In this paper, I analyse the growth of this latter type of mentoring at three levels. I trace the recent rapid expansion of youth mentoring, and identify the emergence of engagement mentoring, a new model of mentoring for social inclusion. I illustrate the model by drawing on a recent case study of a typical engagement mentoring scheme. In conclusion, by connecting the existing evidence (including academic, practitioner-oriented and policy texts) on engagement mentoring with feminist readings of Bourdieu and marxist theory, I problematise this model, and subject it to critical analysis that relocates mentoring within the broader social and economic context from which it is so often disembedded. Let us begin by reviewing the scale of the mentoring phenomenon to date.

The rapid expansion of mentoring for social inclusion

By the early 1990s, one author had already come to describe mentoring as a mass movement which represented a social and historical phenomenon in its own right (Freedman, 1995, 1999). Tens of thousands of middle class adults across North America were volunteering as mentors for poor urban youth through the programme *Big Brother Big Sisters* (BBBS). By the mid-90s, a similar type of youth mentoring had also begun to take root in the UK (Piper & Piper, 1999, 2000). From 1994-95, the Institute of Careers Guidance (ICG) conducted the Mentoring Action Project (MAP), which formed the largest such initiative in Britain to that date. Over a quarter of all statutory careers services in England and Wales participated in the MAP, and 1,700 young people were allocated mentors within it (Ford, 1999). The Dalston Youth Project (Benioff, 1997) became nationally lauded as an exemplar of mentoring for socially excluded youth. Alongside these developments, the National Mentoring Network (NMN) was established in 1994 to support the promotion of mentoring schemes and the development of a national infrastructure.

Miller (2002) has recently catalogued the further expansion of mentoring in a number of advanced capitalist countries (mainly, although not exclusively, Anglophone) during the last five years. In the US alone, *Big Brother Big Sisters* now boasts a quarter of a million volunteers. With presidential backing from George W.Bush, it is currently engaged in a 5-year campaign to recruit 1 million more mentors to work with 14 million young people 'at risk'. The BBBS model has been taken up in Canada and Australia, whilst Israel and Sweden have also seen the development of significant youth mentoring programmes. In the recruitment of volunteers as mentors, there is a noticeable trend (reflected in the case study I shall discuss later) towards drawing on the population of undergraduate students. The largest mentoring project in the US, *GEAR-UP*, is currently aiming to double the 750,000 undergraduate mentors it had in 2000, working with 16-19 year olds at risk of

disaffection. In Israel, 20% of higher education (HE) students act as mentors to children in schools, and in Sweden a similar pattern is being followed. Although mentoring has not flourished to the same extent yet in other European countries, Miller suggests that there are more favourable cultural conditions and growing support for it in Ireland, Norway and the Netherlands.

Mentoring has, however, burgeoned massively in Britain, particularly since it has been enthusiastically embraced by the Labour government elected in 1997. The then Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) (now the Department for Education and Skills (DfES)) immediately began to provide the NMN with a Mentoring Bursary which has been substantially increased year on year. Soon after, the House of Commons Select Committee on Disaffected Children stated that all programmes seeking to address disaffection should include mentoring (House of Commons, 1998). It has since been promoted by four different government departments, covering education, training and employment, youth justice, health promotion, ethnic minorities, and social exclusion. In education, mentoring became a standard ingredient in the recipe of almost every major new policy initiative, including prevention of school truancy and drop-out from PCET (DfEE, 1999a), responses to the report on the Stephen Lawrence inquiry which highlighted institutional racism (DfEE, 1999b), proposals to develop 'gifted and talented' children (DfEE, 1999c), and the *Learning Gateway* initiative to support labour market transitions for young people who had not succeeded at school (DfEE, 1999d).

By the start of 2002, the number of affiliates to the NMN had grown from an initial 350 to 1,250 and still rising. It had also attracted sponsorship from the McDonalds fast food chain. About one third of its programmes organise mentoring for young people in PCET contexts. In addition, one in three schools in Britain now use mentoring in a systematic way, and over 750,000 volunteer mentors are active in such programmes. Many are involved through two major new government programmes which represent the culmination of this trend: *Excellence in Cities*, aimed at improving the academic performance of children from disadvantaged communities in inner city schools; and the *Connexions* service, a new national service which is replacing the existing careers services in England. Its aim is to provide multi-agency support for young people aged 13-19 through their transitions from adolescence to adulthood and from school to post-compulsory education, training and employment (DfEE, 2000a).

Britain also follows the international trend of seeking volunteer mentors from the undergraduate student population. The National Mentoring Pilot Project was launched in 2001, linking 21 Education Action Zones (in deprived inner-city areas) to 17 HE institutions, and matching 800 undergraduate students as mentors to 2,500 young people. This project has, however, found itself in competition to recruit students with *Excellence in Cities*, as well as with mentoring programmes organised through *Millenium Volunteers* and other local initiatives (A.Colley, personal communication, April 2002).

The major programmes organise paid mentors as well as volunteers. *Excellence in Cities* and *Connexions* have already employed 2,400 'learning mentors' in schools since 2000, and this is set to rise to 3,000 over the next two years. In addition, *Connexions* is seeking to recruit 20,000 'personal advisers' to work with 16-19 year-olds. In January 2001, Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer, announced a further £5.3 million from the Treasury to support the development of youth mentoring over the next three years. Subsequently, the Home Office has established 6 regional 'Mentor Points' in major cities to co-ordinate the recruitment

and training of mentors for many of these projects, while *Connexions* has its own large-scale training programme now underway (DfES, 2002).

For the most part, this tidal wave has carried all before it in a surge of celebration. Mentoring seems to encapsulate a 'feel-good' factor, typified in scenes at the NMN Conference and similar occasions: joyously tearful presentations of bouquets from mentees to mentors; or playlets where young people represent their mentors as angels, replete with halo and wings. Yet there is an irony in such a practice being sponsored so heavily by a government overtly committed to evidence-based practice and to the pursuit of 'what works'. There is little evidence to support the use of mentoring on such a vast scale (Skinner & Fleming, 1999). While Ford's evaluation of the MAP demonstrates positive outcomes (Ford, 1999), it has to be noted that the mentors were qualified and experienced careers advisers and youth workers, and that the research did not have a longitudinal element. There is alternative evidence that mentoring may be counterproductive to policy intentions for interventions with socially excluded young people (Colley, 2000b; Fitz-Gibbon, 2000; Philip & Hendry, 1996), and that even where young people are enthusiastic about their experience of being mentored, their mentors may not share this view (Colley, 2001b, forthcoming). Moreover, it is a practice that remains poorly conceptualised and weakly theorised, leading to confusion in policy and practice (Piper & Piper, 1999; Philip, 2000; Roberts, 2000a, 2000b). Before going on to describe and analyse the model of engagement mentoring itself, it is helpful to review the way in which interest in mentoring for young people first developed, and the context for its meteoric rise in the last few years.

Early interest in youth mentoring

One of the earliest spotlights on mentoring for young people 'at risk' came from a psychological study of young people from multi-ethnic communities in Hawaii throughout the first 18 years of their lives (Werner & Smith, 1982). This identified a number of risk factors which made young people vulnerable to maladaptive outcomes such as mental ill-health, criminal offending, and long-term unemployment. However, one of the major findings was that the majority of young people in the study, irrespective of the level of difficulties they faced, achieved successful transitions to adulthood thanks to a number of protective factors. One key factor was that resilient young people sought and obtained support and advice from informal mentors among their kin and community. Similar evidence arose from later studies of young mothers in ethnic communities in the US (Rhodes *et al.*, 1992; Rhodes, 1994). This finding about the protective nature of mentoring in informal, community contexts was seized upon as a basis for introducing planned mentoring schemes, but some important *caveats* raised by the research were often overlooked. These included cautions against a 'false sense of security in erecting prevention models that are founded more on values than on facts' (Garmezy, 1982, p.xix).

There are two main flaws in any assumption that the benefits of such mentoring can be replicated in planned and institutional contexts. Firstly, it is impossible to conclude from the research whether the successful mentoring bonds created by some young people are a *cause* or an *effect* of their resilience. They may represent neither, but simply a researcher-constructed *correlation*. The possibility remains that less resilient young people might have difficulty in bonding with adults. This might mean that the allocation of mentors would be of little benefit, and would risk reinforcing rather than diminishing a young person's sense of isolation. The second danger is that planned mentoring schemes risk ignoring (and working against)

the community-based networks of significant adults that this and similar studies revealed. Value-judgements may dominate decisions about the social groups from which mentors will be sought. Nevertheless, research agendas have continued to assume that investigations of young people's self-sought mentoring relationships 'are likely to indicate fruitful ways of crafting policies and programs so they can be maximally effective for a more diverse population of young adolescents' (Scales & Gibbons, 1996, p.385). The proliferation of such programmes indicates that the transference of mentoring into planned settings has been widely accepted as unproblematic.

A series of evaluations of localised projects in the US (e.g. Blechman, 1992; Dondero, 1997; DuBois & Neville, 1997; Haensly & Parsons, 1993; McPartland & Nettles, 1991; O'Donnell *et al.*, 1997; Ringwalt *et al.*, 1996; Zippay, 1995) indicate how planned youth mentoring began to flourish there. These projects reveal a distinct trend in respect of the goals that mentoring relationships were supposed to pursue. Those goals include so-called 'soft outcomes', such as enhanced self-esteem, but usually continue to focus funding requirements on the 'harder' targets: educational goals including school-related behaviour and academic progress; social goals, such as the reduction of criminal offending and substance abuse; and employment-related goals, such as entry to the labour market or training programmes (McPartland & Nettles, 1991). As Zippay noted:

> The use of mentors in social services programs has become an increasingly common intervention, and *typically aims to increase education and job skills among at-risk youth* (1995, p.51, emphasis added).

Some of the reports of these schemes proffer uncritical and biased promotion of mentoring, appealing to policy makers and institutional leaders to introduce prevention and/or intervention programmes with a strong mentoring element: 'Mentoring is an old idea that works…Adult mentors serve as beacons of hope for young people adrift in an uncertain world,' declares Dondero (1997, p.881). Despite such optimism, they present extremely limited evidence of their claims for the benefits of mentoring.

Others (e.g. McPartland & Nettles, 1991; Ringwalt *et al.*, 1996; and see Dishion *et al.*, 1999, for a fuller review) avoid unsubstantiated claims of this kind, finding evidence of inconclusive and even negative outcomes of mentoring in relation to school achievement and/or anti-social behaviour. Nevertheless, such evidence does not appear to have inhibited the growing popularity of mentoring with policy makers. Despite fairly negative outcomes from their evaluation, the researchers in one such case explained that the project managers:

> are using our evaluation of the project's first two years *to intensify and focus their efforts* for the future. They expect one-on-one mentoring to gradually become available for most student participants… (McPartland & Nettles, 1991, p.584, emphasis added).

Big Brother Big Sisters (BBBS) shares the same approach. It links young people from single parent households with unrelated mentors, claiming the sole aim is to provide these young people with an adult friend, rather than seeking to improve or eradicate specific educational or socio-economic problems (Grossman & Tierney, 1998, p.405). Nevertheless, it too promotes the setting of goals for young people

around improved educational performance, the development of life skills, access to the labour market and improved transitions to adulthood (Freedman, 1995, p.216).

However, Freedman's study of BBBS (1995, 1999) advances the view that broader policy considerations have driven both practice and research in the field of mentoring. He argues that mentoring is popular with policy makers because it resonates with a number of their concerns: the moralisation of social exclusion; the drive of economic competitiveness which proclaims the need for 'upskilling' and the threat posed by an 'underclass'; the attraction of a cheap 'quick fix' to social problems; and its facile affinity with the individualistic philosophy of the 'American Dream'. This produces an 'heroic conception of social policy' (Freedman, 1999, p.21), and exhorts the (white) American middle classes to undertake a 'crusade' towards socially excluded (often Black and Latino) young people. (It is interesting to note, in relation to these authoritarian traits of mentoring policy, that President Bush's support for BBBS is linked to the use of the armed services as a pool for potential mentors (Miller, 2002).)

As youth mentoring has come, slightly later, to develop with similar fervour in Britain, we shall see how this focus on employment-related goals has sharpened. I will argue that this is related to still broader contextual issues. Many of the social and economic imperatives described by Freedman in the US can be recognised as familiar elements of contemporary British policy too: reductions in public spending, concern about youth rebellions and social unrest, employers' drive to cut costs in order to compete in world markets. The discursive context also plays its part in shaping the promotion of mentoring, and this is particularly true of the dominant discourses surrounding young people's transitions from school to work and the metanarrative of globalisation.

Employability and social inclusion

The 1998 Green Paper *The Learning Age* (DfEE, 1998) is a prime example of this discourse, in which key themes include the 'changing world of work' and the end of a 'job for life'; the shift to post-Fordist working practices which are supposed to be 'empowering' for the workforce; and the need for working people to take responsibility for their own lifelong learning in order to remain individually competitive as well as to contribute to the nation's global competitiveness.

Research has challenged this rhetoric in many ways, demonstrating that the reality for many working people has been that of greatly intensified productivity, insecurity, low skills and low pay, and the substitution of a régime of self-surveillance for direct management surveillance (Avis, 1996; Colley, 2000a; Gleeson, 1996; Hyland, 1996 etc.). There have also been a series of substantial critiques of the way in which education, training and wider welfare policies have become highly individualistic (reviewed in Colley & Hodkinson, 2001).

However, this individualistic discourse has impacted considerably upon the way in which young people's school-to-work transitions are understood and interpreted for young people themselves by agencies guiding them through those transitions: careers services, schools, colleges and training providers. One of the most important ways in which they have done so is through the notion of 'employability'. In an era when, even at the height of the economic up-turn, the youth labour market has failed to recover from its collapse in the 1980s, but where employment is heavily promoted by the Labour government as the solution to social exclusion, the responsibility levelled at individuals is to increase their own 'employability'.

Numerous policy documents and research reports have advanced this notion (e.g. DfEE, 1996, 2000b, 2000c; Glynn & Nairne, 2000), but the report *Towards Employability* by the employers' organisation Industry in Education (1996) offers perhaps the starkest definition. This report emphasises employers' demands for 'compromise and respect' in young workers (p.9), that staff need to 'sign on to the values and ethos of the business and fit into its organisational structure, culture and work ethics…to "go with" the requirements of the job' (p.10), and that young people need to consider and adapt 'their own values, attitudes, human interactions…' (p.10). The purpose of education, harking back to James Callaghan's 'Great Debate', is defined as 'providing employers with usable output from the education system, and providing pupils…with a strong chance of gaining employment' (p.22).
Despite the fact that this understanding of employability has been condemned as having 'more to do with shaping subjectivity, deference and demeanour than with skill development and citizenship' (Gleeson, 1996, p.97), it has thoroughly permeated the content of careers education and guidance and of vocational training (Colley, 2000a). In doing so, it promotes three key themes.

Firstly, those working with young people in transition are supposed to encourage them to understand, accept and cope with working life at the periphery, without expectations of full-time or permanent employment. This includes the inevitable insecurity and stress of 'portfolio' careers (Wijers & Meijers, 1996), of daily and weekly fluctuations in the availability of work (Vandevelde, 1998), and of part-time, temporary, subcontracted, and freelance working (Bridges, 1998).

Secondly, it promotes the view that young people need to re-invent their own identities as marketable products. The realisation of individual potential is equated with the maximisation of productivity. Young people's attitudes, values and beliefs consequently need to be transformed. Bridges, for example, has argued that career guidance should focus on transforming clients' attitudes, temperament, and *desire*. For him, employability is about '*Who wants to work the most?*' (Bridges, 1998, p.13-14). This transformation of personal disposition is also a central theme of the Social Exclusion Unit report *Bridging The Gap* (1999), which forcefully promotes the idea that the attitudes, values and beliefs of the socially excluded themselves are a major cause of their (self-)exclusion (Colley & Hodkinson, 2001).

Thirdly, the role of practitioners working with young people in transition is seen as that of overcoming their reluctance to accept these demands by vigorously proselytising the transformations wrought by globalisation as inevitable (cf.Bayliss, 1998; Wijers & Meijers, 1996). The product of such practice should be young people's willingness to embrace both the rhetoric and the reality of the post-Fordist world of work.

Having outlined the social, economic and political context for the emergence of engagement mentoring, I continue by showing how it has developed in this country, and offering a more detailed explanation of the model.

The emergence of engagement mentoring in Britain

Three broad types of youth mentoring have been identified in Britain (Skinner & Fleming, 1999). Industrial mentoring in schools through business-education partnerships have focused on pupils in Year 11 on the borderline of achieving the grade C pass mark in their GCSE examinations, and have deliberately excluded the more disadvantaged or disaffected young people (Golden & Sims, 1997). Community mentoring has aimed to support young people from ethnic minorities by presenting positive role models for success from within those communities on the one hand, and

on the other by offering support and advocacy for young people facing institutional discrimination and structural inequalities. In some cases, such mentoring projects have sought change *other people's* attitudes, values and beliefs, rather than those of the young people (e.g. Forbes, 2000; Majors *et al.*, 2000; Usman, 2000).

The third model of mentoring is as an intervention responding to disaffection and social exclusion. Such projects identify targeted groups of young people 'at risk' of disengaging, or already disengaged from formal systems of education, training and employment, and seek explicitly to re-engage them with such systems in preparation for entry to the labour market. It is for this reason that I have dubbed this model 'engagement mentoring'.

Engagement mentoring emerged in 1994-1995 during the rule of the previous Conservative government. However, at that time it was not developed as an aspect of central government policies. All the schemes were funded through sources other than core funding from the DfEE or other departments. Some were funded through local, discretionary sources, but a considerable number arose through funding opportunities provided by the European Youthstart Initiative, although these origins are not acknowledged in later policy initiatives (see Brine, 2002, for a fuller discussion of such 'erasure').

The Youthstart Initiative was one of four strands of the Employment Community Initiative which ran in two tranches from 1995-1999 within the European Social Fund. It was targeted at young people categorised as disaffected, specifically those who were unemployed and unqualified (Employment Support Unit (ESU), 1999a), and its key aim was to promote effective school-to-work transitions for young people, achieving social integration through integration in the labour market (European Commission (EC), 1998; ESU, 1999b).

'Comprehensive pathways' to overcome complex social and economic disadvantage were a distinctive aspect of the Youthstart programme, advocating co-ordinated inter-agency partnership on behalf of young people. In this way, guidance and support for young people were also seen as central elements of the programme, but were linked to employment outcomes in a way that did not necessarily fit with the traditionally impartial and person-centred ethos of particular services such as career guidance, youth work, or counselling. This 'pathway' was in fact defined in terms of its employment-related direction and destinations.

Even 'soft' outcomes such as self-confidence, which were a hallmark of the Youthstart Initiative's move away from cruder indicators of success, still pose the need to disentangle taken-for-granted assumptions about the processes being undertaken with young people, and to question the programme's assertion of 'holistic' and 'person-centred' approaches. (For a fuller discussion of the genealogy of the term 'holism' and its corruption in present UK education policy, see Colley, in press.) The official literature produced by the Youthstart Initiative presented a clear view of how it interpreted these processes:

> Each of the stages of the pathway is associated with bringing about a *significant shift in the values and motivation* of the young people, their skills and abilities and in their interaction with the wider environment. The overall objective is to move the young person from a position of alienation and distance from social and economic reality, to a position of social integration and productive activity (EC, 1998, p.6, emphasis added).

It proposed 'empowerment activities', of which mentoring was identified as a key element. Indeed, the majority of Youthstart projects in Britain incorporated mentoring (ESU, 2000a). The Youthstart Initiative documentation argued that mentoring should use:

> ...self-evaluation methods and feedback sessions to reinforce *the acceptance of values and attitudinal change amongst the young people* (EC, 1998, p.12, emphasis added).

The assumption of normative categories here leaves open to question *which* values and attitudes are to be instilled in young people, and in *whose* interests. It is particularly notable that one of the foremost obstacles to employment for young people is seen as their own negative perceptions of how they will be treated in training and work (ESU, 2000b), with the implication that a 'correct' perception of workers' and trainees' treatment would be a positive image of working conditions and social relations between employers and employees. Furthermore, it implies that the world young people inhabit outside of participation in 'mainstream' learning and employment opportunities is somehow unreal; that they do not engage in productive activities unless through such opportunities; and that alienation is not a characteristic of the lives of working people who are employed.

At the heart of European policy promoting engagement mentoring, then, we find two key assumptions, expressed in the central goals of the Youthstart programme. The first is that the solution to social exclusion lies in re-engagement with the labour market and/or formal learning routes thereto. The second (in marked contrast with the community mentoring model) is that the specific role of mentoring is to facilitate this re-engagement, by altering young people's values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviour in order to engage their personal commitment to becoming employable. There is, of course, nothing new in this concept of employability shaping various education and training frameworks as instrumental (Bathmaker, 2001), but its influence upon the practice of youth mentoring has barely been questioned or investigated until now.

Twenty of the British Youthstart projects were run under the auspices of the ICG's Mentoring Action Project (MAP), and these reflect a similar ethos. The MAP evaluation report emphasises that:

> the mentors' primary task of *influencing behaviours, and by implication attitudes*, is a fundamental one…attitudes [are] the most difficult, as attitude training needs to engage each individual, and the attitudes then become incorporated into the individual's own frame of reference and values base. MAP is seeking to tackle the most difficult area (i.e. attitudes training) first… (Ford, 1999, p.18, citing L.Barham, personal communication, emphasis added).

The report on all the UK Youthstart projects which undertook mentoring defines and proselytises its use in this way:

> Mentoring is a useful way of re-engaging disaffected young people in self-development, training and employment. Mentoring features strongly in the dissemination and mainstreaming of learning from Youthstart projects (ESU, 2000a, p.i).

It goes on to explain that part of the mentors' role in supporting young people as they enter employment is to 'endorse the work ethic, and…challenge any negative perceptions the young person may have about entry to the labour market' (ESU, 2000a, p.7).

The MAP and other Youthstart projects were funded only until 1999, but as we have seen, by then Labour policy makers were embracing mentoring, and it moved rapidly from the margins into the mainstream. The projects funded through the Youthstart Initiative effectively functioned as pilots for the Learning Gateway, and in many cases were continued under that *aegis* when the European funding came to an end. The same underpinning goals were maintained. For example, the *Guide to Relevant Practice in the Learning Gateway* provides a summary of the tasks of personal advisers, and then emphasises the following point:

> In order to achieve all of these tasks, it is important for the Personal Adviser to recognise that many of the young people entering the Learning Gateway need support *to change their attitudes and behaviours*. Until they do so, these will continue to be barriers to their reintegration (DfEE, 1999e, p.9, emphasis added).

The outcomes sought are summarised thus:

> The focus of much of the Learning Gateway activity is on developing employability, active citizenship and personal development, with a view to progression to mainstream learning (DfEE, 1999e, p.32).

While it could be argued that promoting issues such as personal development or active citizenship could hardly be seen as evidence of employment-dominated goals, a DfEE-sponsored evaluation of the Learning Gateway pilots illustrates the fact that outcomes such as these may indeed be dominated by employers' rather than young people's needs. 'Development of Life Skills' is defined in the early evaluation of the Learning Gateway as:

> …improving the *personal effectiveness of young people in the work place* by assisting them to gain skills in areas such as problem solving, confidence building, development of interpersonal skills, team working, punctuality, diagnoses of personal strengths and areas for personal development and life skills, *which employers regard as essential for applicants to have in order for them to seek employment* (GHK Economics and Management, 2000, p.56, emphases added).

The subsumption of the personal into the work-related is striking in this extract, and forms part of the wider context already outlined. The list could go on, as Piper and Piper's (2000) review of similar mentoring schemes demonstrates. They show how, just as in the US, mentoring for the 'disaffected' is almost invariably tied to employment as the immediate or eventual outcome, and raise critical questions about the way in which claims of empowerment frequently underpin these employment-related goals.

There appears, then, to be substantial evidence from policy documentation and from evaluations of practice in the UK that supports the identification of a distinctive

model of engagement mentoring around three central foci: (a) the re-engagement of young people with formal learning and the labour market; (b) the transformation of their personal attitudes, values and beliefs (in short, their dispositions) in order to engage their commitment to develop 'employability'; and (c) that the role of mentors is to act as a vehicle for the demands of policy-makers and employers to transform young people through the mentoring process. With regard to this last focus, I have discussed elsewhere the way in which many depictions of the mentors' role entail a feminine stereotype of self-sacrifice and nurture (Colley, 2001a). In this respect, engagement mentoring also can also be said to aim at transforming the dispositions of mentors as well.

In order to illustrate the possibilities and problems which may arise from the widespread implementation of the engagement mentoring model, I will draw on the findings from my recently completely doctoral research (for a full account, see Colley, 2001b, forthcoming). I conducted an in-depth case study of a scheme anonymised as New Beginnings. (All other institutions, locations and personal names have also been anonymised here, and some minor personal details altered, to protect confidentiality.) The scheme was run by Wellshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) with European Youthstart Initiative funding. (TECs were local agencies responsible for youth training and for the support of businesses. In 2000, they were disbanded, and their training remit was taken over by the new Learning and Skills Councils.) It recruited 'disaffected' 16 and 17-year-olds (both male and female, but all white), and provided them with a programme of pre-vocational basic skills training and work experience placements, with the aim of progression into work-based youth training (YT) or employment. In partnership with the University of Wellshire (UoW), the scheme also offered the young people the option of being allocated a mentor for one hour a week. The mentors were volunteers, UoW undergraduate students recruited and trained by the university. Some were typical HE entrants direct from sixth form study, while a number were non-traditional mature students. The majority were female, and all were white. The scheme aimed to enhance the employability of both mentors and mentees, since the students were expected to develop improved communication skills, and to utilise the experience in their CVs for entry into the graduate labour market.

The fieldwork was undertaken from December 1998 to July 2000. I carried out repeated interviews with 9 matched pairs of mentors and mentees from the early establishment to the final stages of their relationships, as well as with staff and other professionals associated with the scheme. I also took part in the mentor training course and in the New Beginnings steering committee as a participant observer, undertook observations at the scheme's headquarters, and used documentary evidence such as the scheme's funding bid, the training manual provided to mentors, and the young people's personal records. The approach adopted was a critical interpretive one, focusing particularly on questions of class and gender, given my own disposition as a working class woman with a marxist feminist perspective.

New Beginnings: an engagement mentoring scheme

In its design, New Beginnings had to fulfil the funding criteria for the Youthstart Initiative, which, as we have already seen, sought to integrate disaffected young people into the formal labour market. Most young people arrived at the scheme when they tried to claim unemployment benefits. Under welfare legislation, they were denied benefits because they could get a £45 a week training allowance by participating in New Beginnings. The scheme was also located within a TEC, which

existed to meet not only the training needs of young people, but also the needs of employers in the local labour market. Because of a local combination of a buoyant labour market and high staying-on rates in school sixth forms, Wellshire employers were experiencing difficulty in filling vacancies at the bottom end of the labour market, and meeting this need was an explicit element of the scheme's rationale. Accordingly, the main occupational areas in which the young people were placed were: hairdressing, care of the elderly, retail and basic clerical work (mainly undertaken by young women); unskilled work such as cleaning, packing, and labouring; and the less skilled areas of motor vehicle and building work (mainly undertaken by young men).

Although the scheme did not have any quantitative targets for young people to progress into YT or employment, this did not make such outcomes any the less important for those managing the scheme. Progression from New Beginnings to other work-based training schemes would help the TEC meet other quantitative targets it had to achieve. As the New Beginnings line manager, Brenda Mavers, often told me, 'We're in the business of training and employment'. Kath Martyn, who had senior management responsibility for all the TEC's youth programmes, outlined her definition of the role she hoped New Beginnings mentors would play:

> Mentoring was about befriending, and helping us, perhaps using a different way of talking to the young person, to help that young person to see what we were trying to get…trying to help them with. So the focus was very clearly about getting them into employment. That was very clear, that that's what the mentoring process was about.

The training course for the mentors had an input equivalent to four full days, similar to that for a module on a degree course, well in excess of the few hours training provided for volunteer mentors in many such schemes (cf. Skinner & Fleming, 1999). The training manual which accompanied the course was dominated by the idea that the mentors' main goal was to help get the young people into employment. It posed the overall aims of mentoring within the scheme in this instrumentalist way:

> What is the purpose of education and training? … Primarily education and training can lead to a particular role within the workforce.

Each section of the manual ended with a summary definition of the mentors' role in the context of employment-related goals. Mentors 'could make a difference to the [local] unemployment figures', 'your aim is to encourage and promote the worth of training', 'your role as Mentor is to encourage the minimisation of disaffection'. They were supposed to help young people develop the key skills 'that make them attractive to the workforce', and to change the attitudes of young people who 'do not wish to conform to the values and expectations that society upholds with reference to employment and training.' Conversations in their mentoring sessions were expected to focus on discussion of the training action plan, which was drawn up for the young person by the New Beginnings staff each week.

The training course itself helped to underline this key message about the requirement for mentors to focus on encouraging the young person to accept the discipline of the workplace, and work towards the training and employment outcomes that were expected of them. For all these reasons, New Beginnings can be clearly

located within the model of engagement mentoring as I have defined it above. It tied mentoring to employment-related goals, sought to transform young people's dispositions in line with dominant concepts of employability, and treated the mentors as vehicles for these objectives. How did this technically rational approach to mentoring play itself out in practice?

Experiences of engagement mentoring

One feature of the interviews with mentors was the confusion and conflict they expressed with regard to the role expected of them. Despite the very clear definitions put forward in their training, mentors found it difficult to reconcile this with their actual experiences, and they often felt at a loss to explain their role:

> *Jane*: Mentoring means such a lot, because it's very difficult to define.
>
> *Karen*: Mentoring is difficult, because no one ever tells you exactly what it should be.
>
> *Rachel*: I'm really confused about how the mentoring-… The mentoring side of the [training] course was very sort of: 'OK, this is where you are, this is what you're like'…but when you got there, you didn't know what you were doing.

Moreover, all of the mentors encountered fairly vigorous resistance on the part of their mentees to any attempts to focus the relationship around the employment-related goals promoted by the scheme (for more detailed accounts of this resistance, see Colley, 2000b). Their discussions of these issues, and how they impacted on their relationships with mentees, provide deeper insights into the nature of the scheme. I will recount just two individual examples here to illustrate the contradictions that emerged. One case study focuses on the experiences of a mentee, the other on those of a mentor.

Adrian: the wrong sort of transformation

Adrian came to New Beginnings at the age of 17, having been a 'schoolphobic'. He had also suffered from depression and anxiety, agoraphobia and an eating disorder during his adolescence. He lived at home with his mother, and their relationship was often difficult. Adrian described his post-16 choice as a stark one: between coming to New Beginnings or committing suicide. He found it very difficult to relate to his peers, and had requested an older woman as a mentor. The staff therefore matched him with Patricia. In her mid-30s, Pat had been a personnel manager in a large business, she was now a student teacher, and Adrian talked extremely warmly about the relationship he had established with her. Her support had enabled him to grow tremendously in confidence and self-esteem:

> To be honest, I think anyone who's in my position, who has problems with meeting people, being around people even, I think a mentor is one of the greatest things you can have. I'd tell any young person to have a mentor… What Pat has done for me is, you know, it's just to turn me around and give me positive thoughts…If I wouldn't have had Pat, I think I'd still have the problems at home…You know, she's put my life in a whole different perspective.

Adrian's ambition was to train to work with computers, although he was not sure exactly what this would involve. However, he was placed in a clerical post that involved only basic duties such as filing. Only 13 weeks after he started at the scheme, the placement officer who supervised the young people told me that she had sacked him. Since New Beginnings was designed to prepare young people for employment, it had strict rules about lateness and absence, and Adrian had broken the rules at his placement. He had provided excuses such as a grandfather's funeral and a dental appointment on each occasion, but staff had waited in their cars outside the crematorium and the dental surgery to ascertain that Adrian had not in fact turned up.

Adrian told me that, although he knew he was in the wrong to take time off with fake excuses, he had become frustrated and demoralised in his placement:

> The first day I went, I got filing, but the thing is, is that there's five different types of filing, and my interest was in computers, and now I understand that filing is an important job, isn't it? In an office, someone's got to do it, but the thing is, from nine o'clock in the morning till five, I was filing all day, and I was doing it every day, and it got to Monday night and I thought, what is the point, you know? I'm not doing anything on computers, I'm not doing what I want, I'm filing, and to be honest they were giving me the crap jobs, because there was no way that they would file for eight hours a day, I can tell you that. And I think it's that sort of discrimination in jobs which annoys me, quite frankly.

He felt his depression creeping on again, and some days he simply could not face going to work. He discussed the problem with Pat, who advised him to ask his placement supervisor to let him do some different tasks. Although he did so, he was told that he would have to carry on doing filing all the time.

Pat supported Adrian's modest ambitions to work with computers, and felt that this situation was unfair. But her experience as former personnel manager and as a student teacher gave her a different perspective on the problem. She suspected that there was more to his dread of filing than plain boredom. Adrian had told her how confusing he found the alphabetical and numerical filing systems he had to use, and how he had been so afraid of making mistakes that he did the work very slowly and carefully, but had been told off for this, to his distress. Pat was concerned that unidentified learning difficulties were at the root of the problem, and she tried to advocate on his behalf with the New Beginnings staff, but to no avail.

The New Beginnings placement officer had her own perspective on the situation. She had seen how Adrian had grown in confidence, and took his breach of the attendance regulations as a further indication that he no longer needed the individual support that New Beginnings was supposed to provide. Her feeling was that he had been 'swinging the lead' and 'didn't really want to work'. Such behaviour threatened the scheme's relations with local employers, and undermined her hard work to obtain placements. She therefore sacked him. However, Adrian was not officially recorded as having been dismissed from the scheme. He was offered a place to start a month later at a mainstream 'job club' also run by the TEC. This meant that he would lose his income for a month, and would then only receive an allowance of £20 a week. In this way, he was recorded as an outcome of positive progression, with the implication that his problems had been solved by his participation in New Beginnings.

The greatest blow for Adrian was that his dismissal abruptly ended his contact with Pat in a kind of double punishment, since the scheme strictly forbade mentors and mentees from keeping in touch. His feelings were understandably strong:

> That was an unhappy time for me, you know, to be just cut off, just to be severed away from someone who you explain to and talk to and poured out your heart to, and I was very angry, to be honest.

One year later, he was still unemployed after a number of brief false starts at the job club and on other schemes. Now over 18, he was anxious about his future, and saw 'time running out' as he passed the age limit of all the transitional support available. However, he still identified the mentoring he had undertaken at New Beginnings as a very positive experience, and he had put that experience to use in his subsequent placements:

> I think now I will attach to somebody, one person, you know, and I'll attach to them. You see that person, and you think, 'Yes, I'll hang around with her or him'.

Adrian's story shows how a constructive relationship with an independent adult mentor created a dramatic turning point in his life. It broadened his 'horizons for action' (Hodkinson et al, 1996), raised his aspirations, and motivated him to gain new skills and knowledge related to new technology. However, it was that very transformation of his attitudes, values, and beliefs that took him beyond the pale of the restrictive vocational training opportunities reserved for the young people in this scheme. His disposition was altered, but not in a way that fitted its policy-driven prescriptions. This in turn resulted in his further exclusion from the education and training system – surely an irony in a programme purportedly designed to promote social inclusion for young people like Adrian.

Yvonne: failing to achieve transformation

Yvonne was a 21-year-old social sciences student, with considerable experience of caring for disabled children at home and at work. She was one of the longest-standing mentors at New Beginnings, and well-regarded by the staff, especially as she travelled a long distance, including during university vacations, to keep up her weekly mentoring.

Like Patricia and most of the other mentors, Yvonne found herself mentoring a young person who was enthusiastic about having a mentor, but resisted the other goals of the scheme. Her story is typical of the ways in which most of the female mentors seemed to work upon their own dispositions in order to cope with the contradictions and frustrations that were thrown up by their experience of mentoring at New Beginnings. Her mentee was Lisa, a very bright young woman who had refused to go school after being bullied in Year 10 because of her mother's death. Over the first year of their relationship, Lisa had been found a series of placements, but all of them failed because she found them boring or did not like them. Her real ambition was to go to college, but she feared losing the familiar and small-scale environment provided by New Beginnings, her training allowance (much-needed by her family), and her relationship with Yvonne if she left the scheme. Lisa had grown very attached to her mentor, to the extent that Yvonne feared she was becoming dependent on her.

Yvonne followed closely the guidelines mentors had been given about their role. This was reinforced by what she had seen other mentors achieve early on, as she described a 'good mentoring relationship' she had witnessed:

> There was a batch of us that all started mentoring together, and one of the mentors finished a couple of months after he started. Luckily, the young person that he started with, he'd gone through the whole talking to him or whatever, and he'd gone out and got himself an apprenticeship, he's gone and got himself a job through the TEC, and he's had success in that way, and it had only taken a few weeks.

This was the ideal scenario she felt she had to emulate, but she found it difficult to absorb the frustrations and disappointments of Lisa's repeated failure:

> I've still got to get back to this thing that we're there to encourage them to work, so we've got to keep talking about work and different jobs or whatever, or what they might want to do, or what's holding them back in the job.

Although she declared that she did want to be a 'stooge' of the TEC, the notion that, as a mentor, she had to promote the employment-related goals of New Beginnings had clearly begun to influence her relationship with Lisa in important ways. By the time they had been mentoring together for 18 months, Yvonne was becoming more directive and impatient with her mentee:

> I've said to Lisa, 'You've got to start pulling your socks up'. And there is someone to say, 'Stop whinging and get on with it!' sometimes…There has to come a point where you say, 'Well, everybody has got those sort of problems, but you've just got to get on with it'. I think that's as far as I get with what is a mentor…The purpose of mentoring still baffles me.

But this directive stance clashed more and more with Lisa's oblique and sometimes sullen resistance:

> What is a mentor? Sometimes I think I'm just a verbal punchbag. And that's what I'm there for. She can come in and say, 'The whole world's shite and I don't want to do it', and just get it off her chest.

In the end, Yvonne felt she was not getting the rewards that the scheme had promoted for the student volunteers, but something very different instead:

> It has brought me a lot of stress…I can't remember half the promises [*the university*] made, and I just sit there and think, 'Why did I do this?' I put it on my CV, and then I dread anyone asking me about it in an interview. I really dread it, because I think, well, what do I say, you know?…How could I put it in a way that it wouldn't sound like I was wasting anybody's time…You know, you're one of these do-gooders who does airy-fairy things and doesn't get anywhere. If Lisa had gone off and got herself a job, yes, then I can put it on my CV, 'Oh yes, I got somebody a job', but it wouldn't have been down to me, so I don't know what it's done for me really. I'm still trying to figure that one out along with everything else.

Yvonne judged herself, as well as her mentee, by the expected employment outcomes of engagement mentoring, and felt others would judge her by this criterion too. As mentoring failed to transform Lisa, their relationship seemed to be grinding to difficult halt, but Yvonne felt trapped, and afraid of moving to end it:

> At the end of the day, I've just sort of had to cope with it myself…I just have to switch off, otherwise I'd just crack up, you know. […] I don't want to be the one that says to Lisa, you know, 'You're doing my head in, you're not getting anywhere, go away'. I think in some ways I'm scared of bringing it up in case she thinks I'm pushing her away.

Yvonne wanted to end the relationship, but was prevented from doing so by her sense of obligation to her mentee. She took on the task of shaping her own disposition in order to absorb her intense frustrations in the hope that the relationship could continue.

It was disturbing to witness the downward spiral of this relationship, and how it became an inescapable trap for both of the young women within it. Lisa's ambitions of returning to college were frustrated by the focus of the scheme, yet she refused to capitulate and accept an undesired work placement. Yvonne, however, found that she had to work constantly on her own emotions, suppressing negative feelings and evoking caring sentiments, in order to carry on mentoring without achieving its idealised goals. In this way, caring came to incorporate a controlling effort, both over her mentee and over herself. This took its toll on her of guilt, undermined confidence, and cynicism. The effort to shape Lisa's disposition was in fact shaping Yvonne's disposition too, and possibly to a greater degree.

How can we make sense of engagement mentoring, of its possibilities and problems, in the light of such evidence? In attempting to reflect on the triple aspects of personal disposition, meso-level institutional settings and macro-level contexts, Bourdieu's notions of habitus and field (e.g. Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) may provide a viable theoretical framework, particularly through feminist readings (e.g. Reay, 1998).

Engagement mentoring: the dual transformation of habitus

Engagement mentoring can be seen as a 'field' – a game with its own rules which structures the ways in which players act through the relations of power which exist between them, but is also structured by their agentic strategies and individual interpretation of the game. The players include not only mentors and mentees, but the staff who run mentoring schemes, the institutions in which those schemes are housed and through which they are funded, employers, British and European policy makers, and so on. Power relations in engagement mentoring are therefore far wider than those which may exist within the mentoring dyad itself – something that has rarely been acknowledged in the existing literature.

I argued earlier that engagement mentoring seeks to transform the dispositions of young mentees. It aims to create in them a docility (Foucault, 1991) implicit in the notion of 'employability'. I have also argued that engagement mentoring demands a transformation of disposition in the mentors, and their development of a spirit of devotion and self-sacrifice. Their disposition is supposed to present an ideal role model of employability, as well as of rational action. This devotion can also be seen as a form of docility.

We could replace the word 'disposition' with 'habitus' here. Habitus, according to Bourdieu, is both structured and structuring, because it incorporates aspects of our *pre*dispositions created by factors such as social class and gender, as well as more individual aspects of disposition. It has often been used as a way of explaining behaviour, such as that of career decision-making (Hodkinson et al, 1996), and the ways in which behaviour is both enabled and constrained by the field. However, here we may utilise the concept of habitus in a slightly different way.

The field of engagement mentoring is aimed at transforming the habitus of those on both sides of the mentoring dyad. Its goal is to produce/reproduce habitus in a particular form – an ideal of employability – that is determined by the needs of employers and other dominant groupings, rather than by mentors or mentees themselves. Habitus is thus reified as a raw material, and mentoring becomes represented as a labour process which seeks to work on that raw material, and to re-form it as a saleable commodity within the labour market – in the case of New Beginnings, the market for graduates as well as for young trainees. That commodity is labour power, the one thing that is essential to capitalists' ability to derive surplus value from any production process (Marx, 1975; Rikowski, 2001). As we have seen, the current economic context of globalisation has greatly expanded employers' demands of labour power, so that they increasingly require us to place our very dispositions at their disposition, and our habitus becomes dehumanised as human capital.

This is particularly true when the labour that is demanded is emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983), where the mentor works upon her own feelings in order to re-represent the mentee as an object of caring practice, however difficult that may be. In that process, the predispositions inherent in habitus come into play. Women in particular act to reproduce the stereotypical gendered roles as self-sacrificing carers which society constructs for them from birth (Gilligan, 1995). (Men increasingly face the demand to perform emotional labour too (Lupton, 1998; Yarrow, 1992), but their socially constructed gender roles make them less vulnerable to its more oppressive and painful consequences (Hochschild, 1983).) In engagement mentoring, the greatest contradiction is that this brutal commodification of the self is cloaked in the guise of human relationships commonly assumed to be based on warmth and compassion.

Conclusion

In the above examples we have seen how the rules of the field resulted in the rupture or breakdown of mentoring relationships which had provided important support to two young people. In the case of Yvonne and Lisa, not only did the mentee suffer repeated failure and confirmed exclusion from her academic aspirations, but the mentor also lost confidence in herself, experiencing guilt, stress and fear. The gendered character of Yvonne's habitus is revealed in her determination to maintain her commitment to Lisa, whatever the bitter cost to herself, and that habitus is reinforced by the expectations of engagement mentoring.

In the cases of Adrian and Lisa, engagement mentoring failed to bring about the expected transformation of habitus. Lisa resisted the way it drove her towards work-based training. Adrian's habitus was transformed in spectacular fashion by his experience of mentoring, but in a way that he tried to determine autonomously, also in resistance to the outcomes required by the field. His case, and others evidenced in the whole study, indicate the possibilities for mentoring when young people utilise such relationships proactively to develop their own agendas. They can be truly

transformatory, instigating turning points in a life history, facilitating difficult transitions to adulthood, and expanding horizons for action.

However, the ways in which a life can change direction, in which horizons can expand, and in which habitus can evolve cannot be controlled or predicted in the way that policy approaches assume engagement mentoring can do. Furthermore, habitus, although adaptive, is not easily changed. It is 'enduring' and 'durable' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Such considerations reveal the complexity of the power dynamics of engagement mentoring. Young people are not just passive recipients of such interventions. They do exercise agency and resistance. Mentors are not the most powerful actors in the process of mentoring. They too are subject to the wider regulation of the field, as well as to structural mechanisms of oppression and exploitation. Even the staff who designed and ran the scheme were subject to the way in which mentoring was constructed through European policy, and the way in which that construction was enforced through the requirements imposed by the funding régime of the Youthstart Initiative.

New Beginnings came to the end of its funding, but lived on as the *Learning Gateway* in that locality, and will doubtless have an important relationship to the *Connexions* service as it is introduced there. Similar developments have happened across this country. The findings of my study cannot be generalised in the statistical sense, but they present important evidence of flaws in the conception and in its underpinning assumptions that may be inherent in the model of engagement mentoring. Employment-related goals, or even re-engagement with formal education, are not appropriate for all young people who have become disengaged from these systems (Ford, 1999; ICG, n.d.; Watts, 2001).

While young people such as Adrian (and those who took part in the MAP) may respond enthusiastically to the opportunity for a mentoring relationship, his experience may be seen as a classic example of the traditional ambivalence of the working class towards education. They are caught in a double-bind between the desire to 'get on' and 'get out', alongside the alienation of failure and of being 'found out' (Reay, 2001). In less happy relationships, like that of Yvonne and Lisa, one-to-one individual support may reinforce the young person's sense of alienation, and certainly may not help them understand the social, economic and political roots of social exclusion, which tends to be represented as either deviance or deficit in the individual (Colley & Hodkinson, 2001). Expectations of transforming young people's dispositions through engagement mentoring are thus not only unrealistic, but raise questions about the social justice of such an aim (Gulam & Zulfiqar, 1998; Piper & Piper, 1999, 2000). As Whitty has pointed out:

> …the uncritical use of the language of 'opportunity' in a deeply inegalitarian society can actually serve to legitimate rather than challenge existing relations of domination…[E]ducation reforms couched in the rhetoric of choice, difference and diversity often turn out to be sophisticated ways of reproducing existing hierarchies of class and race. The detail is often more complicated than it used to be, but the underlying patterns remain disturbingly similar (2001, p.289).

We might add that those hierarchies also include gender, and that the 'complexity of detail' includes inequalities visited upon those who do the mentoring as well as those who are mentored. Ecclestone argues that the government's emphasis on the problem of social exclusion as one of non-participation in lifelong learning is an authoritarian

approach which represents the moralisation of risk: 'Importantly, "risk" becomes redefined to mean almost any transgressional behaviour, including autonomy itself' (1999, p.338). Compulsion to participate and controlling models of care are being imposed as a result. I would argue not only that engagement mentoring represents just such a moralisation of risk with regard to young people. Its prescription of the mentor's role and its emphasis on feelings may also represent a 'flip side' of the same controlling process towards those who act as mentors, a parallel tendency towards the moralisation of care. Where the provision of welfare services used to be perceived as an expression of the collective moral good, now increasingly the responsibility for displaying moral goodness has been shifted onto individuals working within the welfare system

If the practice of mentoring vulnerable young people is to avoid these 'underlying patterns', more research is needed into the processes within such mentoring relationships, whether they be with professional or volunteer mentors. This research cannot be limited to narrow measures of prescribed outcomes determined by policy-makers, but needs to engage in in-depth qualitative investigation, which can allow mentors and mentees to tell their own stories of how engagement mentoring is for them. We need critical analyses, and the appropriate application of theory to practice, in ways that can reveal the limitations as well as the strengths of mentoring. Not least of all, such research might serve to mitigate the climate of blame that may well follow when engagement mentoring fails to deliver policy-makers' expectations.

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