

Placement: Reflective Report

For more information on writing a reflection, see Chapter 3

Organizational profile:

XX is a charity which was set up in 1994 with the primary aim of supporting and mentoring disadvantaged young people within local communities. **The organisation runs afterschool sessions in a number of inner city areas in the UK which focus on developing character and attainment.** There are many projects across the different schools in these areas and each of these are divided according to age group and gender. Different sub-groups are run by a project leader and every 'mentee' is paired with a volunteer mentor. **I** volunteered as a mentor and initially attended a three-hour training session where **I** was given the option of selecting a school/project. The training session provided **me** with safe-guarding knowledge and information on XX as an organisation. Subsequently, **I** was placed into the year eight girls project at YY secondary school.

XX's primary aim is to help young people from disadvantaged backgrounds develop aspirations and improve attainment. These individuals are often considered less likely to reach their education and career potential and are referred to the project if their teachers believe they would benefit from a role model. This organisation works to improve low confidence, low aspirations, low attainments and in some cases, behaviour, all of which can impact on whether such potential is fulfilled. As a mentor I was able to experience such growth in confidence first hand. **For example, as the project went on several of the girls in my group displayed more in-class vocal contributions than at the beginning of the academic year.** In addition, the project's aim to improve English and Mathematical skills through academic tasks in order to maximize the benefits from each session was demonstrated by the girls' increased ability to complete these tasks with less confusion and assistance over time.

Despite XX's successful expansion into a number of British cities since first being set up in 1994, the organisation faces several key issues which impact on their assistive abilities. Firstly, as many mentors for this organisation are university students, there is an ongoing need for recruitment of volunteers. This is because students are not permanent, and

Structural features

Communication features

Subheadings to guide the reader (usual in a report)

Introductory paragraph to provide background to the essay.

Complex sentences with correct punctuation
⇒ See Ch.5 'Writing with accuracy'

Use of personal pronoun 'I' and 'me' to demonstrate the personal nature of the reflection (not usually used in other academic writing).
⇒ See Ch. 3

Further background information to provide more detail

Relating the information to the writer's personal experience using a clear example

Paragraphs describing issues faced by the organization

in many cases, their university town is their second home. This results in a rapid turnover of mentors. Furthermore, universities have holidays which often differ to that of schools and this can result in times when many of the mentors are still away when the project has started again. Mentee attendance is also an issue, as many of the children – particularly the older girls – are less inclined to attend these after school sessions.

Furthermore, due to many of these schools being multicultural, there are an increasing number of students who have English as a second language. This means these individuals often have a greater need for additional support. This can cause increased demands for XX's services in some areas with high numbers of recent immigrants, resulting in large group sizes for the project.

Project/work overview

XX's aim is to address the problem that disadvantaged children are less likely to achieve their full education and career potential. A high proportion of these children do not achieve a set of qualifications, which can result in an increased likelihood of unemployment in later life. Social experience and background are also significant predictors of post-schooling success. This means a mentoring programme that both enhances social skills and education is highly valuable to children from these types of backgrounds and has the potential to improve their future prospects.

The project I was placed on consisted of a large group of approximately sixteen year-eight girls. However, this number varied due to new mentees or mentors joining or leaving the group. Many of these girls showed confidence issues or in some cases, behavioural issues. Our group was led by a project supervisor and met every Thursday evening of school term time for two hours (from six until eight pm). Each volunteer (or 'mentor') was paired with one of the girls, yet this was subject to change dependent on who could attend each session. For the first hour of the session, I would work with my mentee (one-to-one) on either a Maths or English task and then we would take part in a wider group activity which was designed to build character. For the second hour of the session, the girls took part in a sporting activity which was led by a coach and our project leaders. This meant we (as mentors) only took part in the first hour. The time I spent with my mentee was divided into sub-tasks: thirty minutes were spent on the Maths or English educational activity, twenty minutes were spent on a group

Paragraphs describing how the writer developed during the placement: Preconceptions, analysis of preconceptions, what actually happened, analysis of why and evaluation of experience.

activity focused on character strength and, finally, ten minutes were spent on a short reflection of the session. The group activities focused on improving four key strengths: Fairness, Self-Control, Good Judgement and Staying Power. All of these strengths are considered key to improving potential.

We were informed in our training session, that as mentors, our role was to guide and assist our mentee where possible with the key objectives of both improving self-confidence and tackling educational inequality. We were each told in confidence the reason our mentee had been referred to the project, with mine primarily being related to her self-esteem, confidence, and her attainment in English. In order to try to overcome these problems, my project ensured consistency for the mentees by pairing the same mentor to each young person every week. This meant a relationship of trust could develop as the project progressed, as this was considered vital in maximizing improvements in confidence. We, as mentors and role models, were given the option to give a short presentation about our degree to demonstrate to the girls the options and prospects that they have ahead of them.

Reflective learning

When I started the project seven months ago, I **had** some preconceived ideas about what the sessions would be like. In the first meeting, I **had expected** interaction with the mentees to be easier and more natural than it actually **was**. I **had predicted** that the girls would behave in a child-like way. However, this **was** not the case at all. My preconceptions **may have been because** I had forgotten the way in which I behaved at thirteen. Finding that my expectations were wrong made me feel more nervous as I was initially unsure of what language would be appropriate to use around my mentee in a learning environment without sounding patronising. In our training session, the fact that we – as mentors – were role models for these young people had been reinforced. Emphasis was placed on the large amount of responsibility associated with mentoring ‘disadvantaged’ young people and the difference we could make to their career potential. Furthermore, **research had shown me** that the power a role model holds can be utilized to improve a role aspirant’s (in this case, **my mentee’s**) motivation (Morgenroth et al., 2015). This contributed to my nerves because I placed significant pressure on myself to behave in a way which would set a good example. It took me a number of sessions to overcome these nerves. But as my

Language for talking about preconceptions: past simple, past perfect.

Personal language for linking own experience to sources

Cautious language for analyzing reasons

time on the project continued, I got to know my mentee more and built up some trust, and this resulted in me feeling more comfortable and subsequently more confident. I believe I was initially slow and less assertive at getting my mentee through the academic tasks. However, within a matter of weeks I noticed improvements. **In hindsight, I think** my overthinking and over-worrying about such pressures was unnecessary, **as I feel** I did, on the whole, lead a good example for my mentee. In addition, **I think** my uncertainty and nerves were due to my lack of confidence at the beginning of the project.

Language to show evaluation
and reflection

When I met my mentee, the issues in self-esteem, confidence and attainment were prominent, but this could have been due to it simply being our first session. As further sessions went on, however, I realized that she was extremely lacking in self-confidence and her English abilities were lower than expected for a girl of her age. In the earlier sessions, she was reluctant to contribute to the group activities or raise her hand in answers to questions. Even when participating in pair work with just me, particularly in the first two weeks, she appeared afraid to respond to my questions or engage in normal conversation. Initially, I was disappointed as I felt I was not succeeding as a mentor due to her lack of responses, but I gradually realised progress in confidence would simply take time. In order to overcome this, I primarily focused conversation around both the group activity and academic tasks which had been set. This meant my mentee would engage in both the activity and speaking to me. As time went on, I expanded conversational topics to topics she may have been interested in, such as current TV programmes and music interests. This, much to my relief, seemed to initiate more meaningful and in-depth conversations and I learnt from this that non-academic topics were most successful in developing a relationship. This real-life experience confirmed Kolb's (1974) learning cycle, whereby successful learning occurs when an individual progresses through four key stages which feed off one another. Once my mentee started to engage in more conversation, she also showed an increased interest in the academic activities. During the seven months on placement, I saw a dramatic change in both her Maths and English abilities, which appeared to be linked to confidence. She offered more contributions to group work and would initiate increasingly in-depth conversations with me as the academic year went on. This corroborates Goldner and Mayseless's (2008) findings as they found mentoring to play a positive role in both social

and academic adjustment in children. I was extremely glad to see progress, albeit slow, but it demonstrated a positive outcome for both my mentee and myself. This has taught me I need to be more patient when interacting with young people and hopefully I can apply this to future experiences.

This short work placement has been an extremely rewarding experience, providing benefits for both my mentee and myself. Each session not only increased my mentee's confidence but also increased my own, and upon reflection I can now see that I was incredibly nervous and quiet on initial meetings. Both myself and my mentee saw improvements in key strengths such as good judgement and staying power. I believe this is a result of not only confidence growth, but obtaining the knowledge that I had provided help to someone who may need it more than others. I had not expected to see such changes within myself but I have become more confident as a result. Benefits such as these reflect research carried out by Phillip and Hendry (2000) who found the experience of being a mentor beneficial to both mentor and mentee. Furthermore, their paper emphasizes the positive perception mentors uphold of their experiences. This, alongside my experience, demonstrates a collective satisfaction across mentors, suggesting projects such as these are beneficial to all involved. Additionally, the academic tasks have allowed me to develop teaching skills. I believe my role contributed to the organisation's wider aims, as my work proved in line with the project's primary goals of character and attainment development. Despite there being many pairs of mentors and mentees carrying out the same tasks each week, each pair developed unique character strengths.

This report has enabled me to reflect on my experience of mentoring a disadvantaged young person for seven months, and through this task I have gained greater awareness of my own strengths and weaknesses. I have learnt that confidence needs time to develop, and that everyone is nervous in new situations. My self-belief has increased as a result of this experience, and I now know that success is related to time, and effort and that staying power is important even when things seem to be going badly.

Paragraph summarizing personal development from the placement experience.

Concluding paragraph summarizing personal development from the experience of writing the reflective report.

References:

Goldner, L., & Maysless, O. (2008). The Quality of Mentoring Relationships and Mentoring Success. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 38(10), 1339–1350. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10964-008-9345-0>

Kolb, D. A. (1976). *The Learning Style Inventory: Technical Manual*. McBer & Co, Boston, MA.

Morgenroth, T., Ryan, M., & Peters, K. (2015). The motivational theory of role modeling: How role models influence role aspirants' goals. *Review of General Psychology*, 19(4), 465–483.

Philip, K., & Hendry, L. (2000). Making sense of mentoring or mentoring making sense? Reflections on the mentoring process by adult mentors with young people. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 10(3), 211–223.

Reference list using
APA style referencing.

Diana and Tom's Comments

This is a very good reflective report that clearly and concisely explains and critically evaluates the writer's experiences as a mentor with the organisation. There is substantive reflection throughout with thoughtful consideration of impact and outcomes for the mentee, and good use of sources to support the ideas. The writer's learning journey is objectively evaluated, to demonstrate where they had come from and what they can take forward. There could have been a little more focus on the writer's feelings and behaviour, but this is only a minor issue.