

Initial perception of the mentoring role and related mentors' approach of autonomy support or control in formal youth mentoring relationships

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Abstract

Mentors' initial perceptions of the mentoring role in formal youth mentoring bonds; and the subsequent characteristics of autonomy support or autonomy control in mentoring interactions developed by mentors after 5 months of mentoring experience are discussed in this paper. The data is drawn from a longitudinal phenomenological study conducted in the Czech mentoring scheme between 2010 and 2017. In-depth semi-structured interviews were collected with 10 mentoring matches over 1 year of mentoring involvement. The results of Interpretive phenomenological analysis showed differences in mentors' initial perceptions of the role, and related autonomy-supportive or autonomy-controlling characteristics in mentors' approach. The benefits and risks of resulting autonomy support or control in mentoring interactions are discussed. The results argue for the theoretical conceptualisation of a child-centred perspective in youth mentoring that aims at mentees' support of autonomy, active agency and empowerment, thus arguing for further in-depth exploration of natural mentoring principles in child-centred perspective, supporting approaches such as youth-initiated mentoring, and broadening the discussion on good evidence-based mentoring practice in the EU context.

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KEYWORDS

autonomy social support, empowerment, IPA, mentoring experience, significant adults, youth agency, youth mentoring

1 | INTRODUCTION

Mentoring relationships are developmental intergenerational bonds between children or youths¹ (mentees) and their significant adults (mentors), commonly defined as a reciprocal relationship in which the mentors share their experience with mentees, offer guidance, and support their development. Natural mentoring relationships contribute to positive personal, relational, and academic outcomes for youths (Van Dam et al., 2018). Yet, meta-analyses have consistently shown that the positive effects of natural mentoring are facilitated in minor effects or even lacking in formal mentoring (Christensen et al., 2020; DuBois et al., 2002, 2011; Raposa et al., 2019).

In general, formal mentoring bonds have been distinguished according to the characteristics and quality of mentoring experiences, dynamics, and perceived benefits reported by participants. The relationships may be satisfied and dissatisfied (Morrow & Styles, 1992), developmental and prescriptive (Morrow & Styles, 1995), have an equal-friendly approach, approach with an unresolved challenge in a mentoring role, or have an authoritarian-intentional approach by mentors (Brumovska & Malkova, 2020). Or distinguished as with the 'conventional' and 'playful' purpose of mentors and their approach to mentees (Karcher & Nakkula, 2010).

Qualitative studies on natural and formal mentoring bonds have found several characteristic features of quality beneficial relationships. The objective quality relational features were identified as the frequency of contact of the match; length of the relationship; and perceived benefits that predicted positive experiences of closeness (DuBois & Neville, 1997; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Subjective relational features of quality mentoring bonds were recorded as perceptions reported and reflected by mentors and mentees that affected relational dynamics, including relational satisfaction; perceived closeness and trust; interpersonal attraction; the challenge in confidentiality; and frequency of conflict (DuBois & Neville, 1997; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Karcher et al., 2005; Madia & Lutz, 2004).

Importantly, studies showed that individual features in mentors' approach to children and the role, such as mentors' attitudes to mentees (Karcher et al., 2010), unrealistic expectations about time and the nature of the relationship at the beginning of mentoring involvement; and the perception of the mentoring role (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes, 2005; Spencer, 2007b) moderated the quality in experiences and perceived benefits of formal mentoring. Mentors' perceived discrepancy between the expected and the experienced role (Madia & Lutz, 2004); perceived self-efficacy; and a priori (positive) motivation (Karcher et al., 2005; Spencer et al., 2017) were common themes of mentors' experiences that affected the relational characteristics and dynamics, and thus the benefits for mentees. Mentors' approach, perceived by mentees as favourable for their relational satisfaction, was described as a quasi-parental role in which mentors were role models (Dallos & Comley-Ross, 2005), while they overcame mentees' negative expectations quickly and were perceived upon first impressions as surprisingly interesting and kind (ibid.). An empathetic, youth-centred approach was experienced as mentors sensibly understood the mentees and their personality, character, interests, and needs. Young people emphasised the importance of mentors accepting them on their own terms and valuing and empowering their capabilities (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Spencer, 2006). In terms of relational dynamics,

¹Regarding the terms 'Child' and 'Children', we understand and use terms 'the child' and 'children' in line with the definition of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: Child is a person between 0–18 years of age.

young people specifically valued experiences of trust; control, reciprocity, fun, and sharing (Liang et al., 2002; Philip, 2006; Philip et al., 2004; Spencer & Liang, 2009). They emphasised that mentors supported them by listening to their matters and offering validation, feedback, suggestion, and acceptance (Dallos & Comley-Ross, 2005; Spencer & Liang, 2009). Mentors' ability to listen and respond with honesty and genuine feedback, without passing judgements on the mentees for their behaviour, made their emotional support work (Dallos & Comley-Ross, 2005). Beneficial mentors were seen as honest in their advice and as reliable, available, respectful, and engaged in the relationship (*ibid.*). As a result, mentees experienced trust and mutual openness and believed that mentors cared for, understood, and knew them (Spencer & Liang, 2009) and gave them a sense of being valuable and significant (*ibid.*).

In addition, several remarkable studies have addressed the risks in formal mentoring relationships. Rhodes et al. (2009) opened a discussion of the ethical issues and the risks for mentees. This discussion is still rather overlooked in the field; the focus remains on 'what works'. Nevertheless, the studies found that a perceived mismatch between a mentor and mentee predicted low relational satisfaction; conflict; and short duration. Mentors perceived sources of a mismatch as differences of background; age; interests; or personality with mentees (Spencer, 2007b). The negotiation of secure relational boundaries was a risk factor, as it presented a challenge to cope within the role. Poorly managed endings undermined the benefits of formal bonds perceived by mentees (Philip, 2006; Spencer, 2007b; Spencer et al., 2017).

Furthermore, certain features were identified in the mentors' approach that predicted low perceived relational satisfaction, low perceived benefits, and premature endings of the bonds. Morrow and Styles first identified the features of a risky approach by mentors in 'dissatisfied' (1992) and 'prescriptive' (1995) mentoring bonds. In these formal relationships, youths did not have a voice in determining activity types, while mentors primarily intended to fulfil goals they set, pushed children to achieve these aims, and did not attend to mentees' needs, personalities, and wishes. The children tended to withdraw from meetings and end the relationships prematurely in these bonds. Similarly, Coley (2003) analysed the British mentoring programme and showed how the judgemental prescriptive approach of mentors toward mentees was rather discouraging than empowering the young people. Brumovska and Malkova (2020) studied the experiences of 10 mentors over 1 year and their approach to mentees and identified three types of mentoring approaches. This study included a theme of mentors' perceived mentoring role at the beginning of mentoring involvement. As a result, only one identified approach, called friendly-equal, was positively impacting at the relationship's durability and relational satisfaction.

Yet, the literature still shows a lack of detailed knowledge about the features of relational characteristics and dynamics that mediate both the benefits and risks in formal mentoring bonds (Cavell et al., 2021; Meltzer et al., 2018; Thomson & Zand, 2010; Van Dam & Schwartz, 2020). Mentors' approach to mentees is critical in developing a supportive and beneficial formal mentoring bond. Yet, no studies on formal mentoring bonds explored mentors' initial perceptions of the mentoring role and its relation to the mentors' approaches developed in mentoring interactions over 12 months of mentoring involvement in detail to date.

2 | NEW CONCEPTS AND APPROACHES IN FORMAL YOUTH MENTORING

Following the identified positive as well as risk factors in formal mentoring bonds, the recent discussion in the field has turned to new approaches to mentoring interventions. The focus is now put on the youth-centred approaches, empowering young mentees with supporting youths' autonomy and well-being (Brumovska, 2017; Davis & McQuillin, 2022) or more generally addressing and facilitating mentees' social capital (Prieto-Flores et al., 2020). While the concept of empowerment is broad and often ambiguously applied in youth work (Martinez et al., 2016), we argue that the goal of the formal mentoring interventions should remain in fostering the functions, quality, and benefits of natural mentoring relationships with focus on positive individual development

of mentees, with youth-centred approach and the best interest of the child (Brumovska, 2017; Brumovska & Malkova, 2010).

At the same time, the in-depth conceptualisation of natural mentoring and the processes it facilitates youths' individual empowerment that formal mentoring can theoretically build on is still missing in the field. Natural mentoring relationships are distinguished from other youth-adult relationships with the facilitation of positive youth development through support of youths' basic human needs of relatedness, autonomy, and competence (Brumovska, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 1985). In that perspective, natural mentoring is beneficial for youths as the supportive youth-adult bond that empowers² the development of individual youths' autonomy and agency, and a sense of self-efficacy in various skills.

Similarly, the young person gains a voice and space for the expression of their needs and interests that are heard and realised in mentoring activities (Lundy, 2007) through the experience of a positive close, trusting formal mentoring bond (Rhodes, 2005), with developed positive collaboration and companionship in mentoring interactions (Spencer, 2006). A young person becomes intrinsically motivated, gains experiences of autonomy in interactions with a mentor and becomes empowered to exercise their skills in mentoring interactions (Brumovska, 2017). This experience, in turn, impacts other relationships in mentees' social networks and the overall individual positive development of a mentee in their skills and talents (Deci et al., 1994; Rhodes, 2005; Ryan & Solky, 1996). However, in contrast to natural mentoring, the positive formal mentoring bonds in formal mentoring programmes and interventions can develop but not automatically, and not in all cases.

3 | CONCEPTS OF AUTONOMY SUPPORT AND AUTONOMY CONTROL IN EXPERIENCES OF FORMAL YOUTH MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

We argue that the concepts of autonomy and related autonomy support are importantly useful for the theoretical conceptualisation of helping and risky processes, and benefits of formal youth mentoring bonds. Using the concept of autonomy support, this study aims to report how mentors' different initial perceptions of the mentoring role related to the autonomy-supportive and autonomy-controlling features on mentors' approaches developed in mentoring interactions over 12 months of mentoring involvement.

The concept of autonomy as a basic human need conceptualised in Self-determination theory (SDT, Ryan & Deci, 1985) provides theoretical insight into the benefits of autonomy support for the development of young people facilitated in youth-adult bonds. Davis and McQuillin (2022) recently discussed the benefits of support of autonomy development in youths, specifically applied to youth mentoring. They argued that these benefits can be facilitated by mentors through five domains in the mentors' role: Role modelling; encouragement; provision of access to resources, relationships, and experiences; advocacy and conversation about behaviour change.

An SDT sub-theory—cognitive evaluation theory (CET, Deci et al., 1994; Ryan, 1991; Ryan & Solky, 1996) introduces the autonomy-supportive and autonomy-controlling approach of significant adults in youth-adult interactions. Overall, autonomy support is defined in CET as:

...the readiness of a person to assume another's perspective or the internal frame of reference and to facilitate self-initiated expression and action. It typically entails acknowledgement of others' perceptions, acceptance of the other's feelings, and an absence of attempts of control the other's experience and behaviour. (Ryan & Solky, 1996, p. 252).

²Empowerment is understood here as 'Enhancement of one's capacity to act.' (Allen, 1999; Haugaard, 2012).

Weinstein and Ryan (2010) showed how receivers of care from autonomy-supportive professional carers experienced care with more benefits than those of carers with an autonomy-controlling approach. CET captures detailed features of interactions that are either beneficial or thwarting for youths' autonomy and related intrinsic motivation, relational satisfaction, development of talents and skills and overall well-being of young people (Deci et al., 1994; Ryan, 1991). It particularly defines the features of autonomy-supportive interactions in youth-adult bonds as: Acknowledgement of conflicting feelings in the event of conflict; minimising pressure and conveying choice in the events of control and limit-setting; and Support for an optimal challenge in enjoyable interactions. Autonomy controlling interactions are, on the other hand, defined in CET as experienced with: Instrumentality in interaction (interaction as a mean to the pre-set goal); Evaluative, pressuring, or rigidly coercive messages in language in youth-adult interactions; and Expectations on behaviour with rewards for compliance (c.f. Brumovska, 2017; Deci et al., 1994; Ryan, 1991, 1993; Ryan & Solky, 1996). As such, CET can theoretically inform research on benefits and risks in formal mentoring bonds.

Following the research aims, this paper applies CET to explain how the initial perceptions of the mentoring role were related to the autonomy-supportive and autonomy-controlling features of mentoring interactions developed by mentors after 5 months of mentoring involvement. We report partial results of a study on relational characteristics and dynamics (Brumovska, 2017) tracked in 10 formal mentoring matches over 12 months in a Czech mentoring programme with the following question: How do initial perceptions of the mentoring role relate to autonomy support or autonomy control developed in mentors' approach in formal mentoring bonds over 12 months?

4 | MATERIALS AND METHODS

4.1 | Methodology and research design

Considering the focus on qualitative aspects of process of development of mentoring relationships over 1 year of mentoring involvement, the study was designed as a longitudinal qualitative tracking study using phenomenological methodology because it allows for examination of how people make sense of their significant experiences (Kvale, 1996; Smith et al., 2009). More specifically, multiple in-depth phenomenological interviews as a method of data collection and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA, Smith et al., 2009) as a method of analysis and reporting. QSR International NVivo software (REF, Bazeley, 2007) was used to store the interview transcripts and conduct the analysis.

4.2 | Participants

Due to its idiographic focus, IPA aims to understand and compare details in the experiences of phenomena between cases, in a relatively small, homogenous sample (Smith et al., 2009). Research sample consisted of participants with experiences of the mentoring relationship in the BBBS CZ programme, albeit in different roles.

Fieldwork, recruitment, and data collection took place between 2010 and 2012 in two affiliate organisations of the Big Brothers Big Sisters CZ/Pet P mentoring programme in urban environment in the Czech Republic (BBBS CZ). The BBBS CZ recruited, trained, matched, and supervised mentoring matches in line with BBBS International standards of practice.

The aims of the study and participation process were explained to newly trained mentors in BBBS CZ (potential participant pool) in autumn 2010 through oral presentations and information sheets. Caseworkers explained the research to parents and children in person and them with research information sheets. The interested participants

were provided with and signed the written consent form, agreeing to take part in the study for 12 months. As a result, 10 new mentoring matches were recruited and completed the study.

4.3 | Research sample

There were 10 volunteer mentors (8 female, 2 male): high-school students (1), college students (4), or employed (5), all aged between 18 and 28 years. The 10 mentees were 6 girls and 4 boys aged between 6 and 15, all were Caucasian of Czech origin. Professionals identified them as children with various higher needs who could benefit from mentoring support. They had socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, were in institutional care, were diagnosed with ADHD, had health difficulties, or experienced issues of exclusion from their peers, such as bullying at school. They were referred to the BBBS CZ services by school psychologists, educational support workers, GPs, special pedagogues, or psychiatrists.

4.4 | Data collection method

In-depth semi-structured interviews of 20–75 min with 10 mentors and mentees³ were conducted during the first month and after 5 and 8 months of the mentoring experience. The first round explored initial motivations for involvement, expectations, understanding of the roles, and first experiences and perceptions of mentoring relationships. The second and third interviews explored reflections on involvement, experiences, perceived satisfaction and benefits, mentors' approach to children, and relational dynamics. Ten parents/carers were interviewed twice, during the first month and after 8 months. Parents reflected on their experiences with the programme, perceptions of their child's mentor, and perceived satisfaction and benefits for children.

Three caseworkers from the two branches of BBBS who regularly supervised the tracked matches once a month over the period of 12 months provided further information that helped us contextualise the matches from the programme's perspective. Together, the data collection process yielded 30 interviews with 10 mentors, 30 with 10 children, 24 with parents, and 6 interviews with 3 caseworkers from BBBS CZ.

4.5 | Data analysis

The data analysis process followed the iterative cycles of the IPA as described by Smith et al. (2009). This process began by listening to the recordings and verbatim transcription and anonymization of the interviews, proceeded through careful inductive analysis of each of the 10 cases (consisting of the 10 participating mentoring matches), before moving on to the cross-case comparison and refinement of the themes relevant to the research question. This process is schematically outlined in Figure 1 below.

For this paper, three of these themes (Initial perceptions of the mentoring role, initial perception of mentors' efficacy in facilitating mentees' needs and well-being and approach of mentors in mentoring interactions after

³Interviews with 10 mentees were conducted at the same time to mentors' interviews, on mentees' experiences of mentoring meetings and perceptions of mentors. Interviews with children and young people—respondents who ranged between 6 and 15 years—were adjusted with child-and-youth-centred approach to interviewing, using play or arts-based methods associated with mentors and mentoring experiences. They narrated about the interview topics during the play activity. Arts-based tools were also used to induce the theme of mentoring experiences, for example, children draw and narrated on their mentors upon the picture of 'a ginger man'. These interviews were part of the case studies analysis in the earliest stages of IPA analysis. The results of these interviews are present in the research results implicitly in the overview on the relational processes and interactions, presented in research results. This paper, however, reports the data of mentors' interviews.

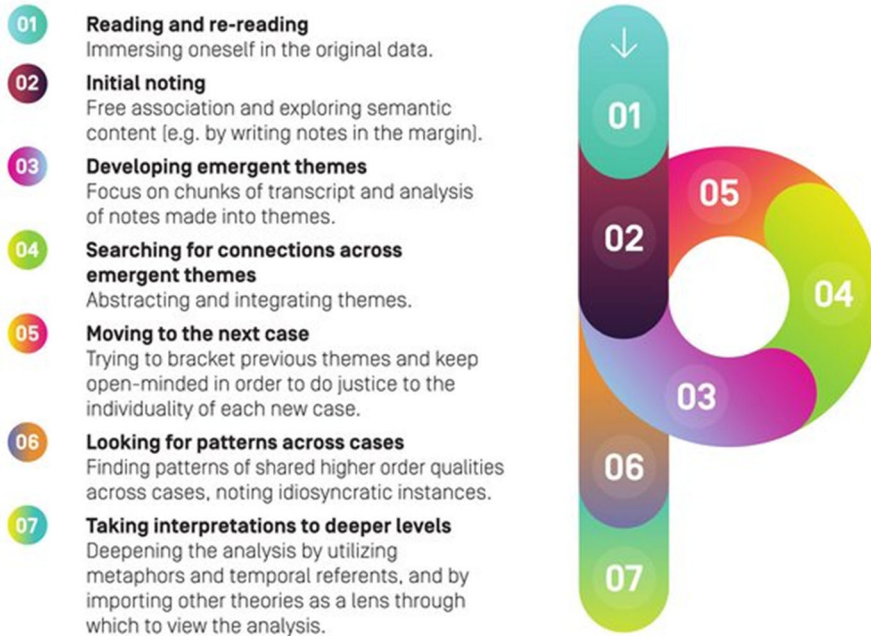


FIGURE 1 The-seven-steps-of-IPA-data-analysis (by Charlick et al., 2016 adapted from Smith et al., 2009).

5 months of mentoring involvement) below were further interrogated from the standpoint of the SDT (Ryan & Deci, 1985) and integrated into two overarching superordinate thematic clusters that describe two distinct types of mentor-mentee relationships identified as autonomy-controlling and autonomy-supportive relationships (Deci et al., 1994; Ryan & Solky, 1996; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010) in the context of formal mentoring relationships described and discussed in the following sections.

The analysis was conducted by the first author of the study and supervised and discussed with two expert supervisors in the field. The IPA process yielded 10 distinct themes common to all mentors in their experiences and perspectives in formal mentoring which are described in full detail elsewhere (c.f. Brumovska, 2017).

5 | RESULTS

This paper discusses the mentors' initial perceptions of the mentoring role, and features of provided autonomy support or control developed in mentoring interactions after 5 months. It shows how mentors:

- Perceived their mentoring role and mentees' needs.
- Perceived their efficacy in facilitating mentees' needs and well-being in the mentoring role.
- What features of autonomy support or control mentors facilitated in mentoring interactions after 5 months of involvement.

The data show that mentors developed autonomy-supportive and autonomy-controlling mentoring bonds (Deci et al., 1994; Ryan & Solky, 1996) with their approach to children following their initial perceptions of the mentoring

role. The results show the different experiences between mentors with initial controlling motivations and mentors with initial autonomous motivation (c.f. Brumovska & Brady, 2021). We call these groups autonomy-controlling ($n = 6$) and autonomy-supportive ($n = 4$) mentors.

Table 1 illustrates the structure of the reported themes found (1) Common in all mentors' experience of their involvement, (2) Different themes follow mentors' initial controlling and autonomous motivation for mentoring. The themes summarised in the Table 1 are further reported in details in the Results section below.

TABLE 1 Overview and structure of research results

Common themes of mentors' experience	Autonomy-controlling approach	Autonomy-supportive approach
Initial perceptions of mentees' needs	Perceptions of Needs based on children's background information Mentees' background perceived as deficient to facilitate mentees' needs	Perceptions of needs based on experiences with children in mentoring interactions Mentees perceived as autonomous and healthy
Perceived efficacy in facilitating children's needs and well-being	Perceived efficacy as an intentional role model: Showcasing 'Socially-Normal' background and social norms Facilitating experiences of 'Social Normality' to mentees	Perceived neutral initial efficacy in facilitating children's needs Perceived positive efficacy in facilitating relaxation, play, and fun
The approach of mentors in mentoring interactions after 5 months of involvement	Negative evaluation of children's character, autonomy and competence Control of autonomy in mentoring interactions by controlling mentees' choice Control of mentees' autonomy in selection of activities and organising meetings by cooperation with the parent/guardian	Perceived positive character, autonomy and competence in children Support of autonomy in mentoring interactions by providing child-centred options and choices, and cooperation with mentees Support of mentees' autonomy in interactions on selection of activities by facilitating negotiation with mentees on child-centred choices

Note: Table 1 shows overview of the research results by identified themes in mentors' experiences, perceptions and approach: (1) Common themes of perception of the mentoring role (perceived mentees needs and perceived efficacy in facilitating mentees' needs and well-being) and mentors' approach in mentoring interactions after 5 months of involvement. (2) How the common themes differed in autonomy-controlling and autonomy-supportive approaches of mentors in their perceptions of the role and interactions with mentees.

6 | AUTONOMY-CONTROLLING MENTORS

6.1 | Initial perceptions of mentee's needs

6.1.1 | Perceptions of needs based on children's background information

Mentors with initial controlling motivations expected that children had unfulfilled needs that would spring from their background experiences. They interpreted children's background as deficient, dysfunctional, and incapable of satisfying children's basic human needs. They linked this perceived deficiency with their role as mentor in the mentee's life, interpreting it as important to facilitate children's healthy development and well-being:

It wasn't my expectation that the child with many hobbies and leisure-time groups, his parents taking care of him, and him having friends, that he would need another extra friend [...] I think there are children who really need it [mentoring] more [...] I thought it is focused on kids from socially weak families who don't have much social contacts [...] I expected children who are very introverted, with issues ... kind of that they would be fat, with glasses, lisping [laughs], others will be laughing at them and they won't have any friends ... who would like to have a friend but is unable to meet one ... excluded somehow ... I knew about [my mentee's] family background ... and [that] some things are not working out there [...] she is from a socially disadvantaged, or broken, family ... so it is kind of good for her that she can be matched with a female mentor. (Květa, January 2011).

6.2 | Perceived role and efficacy in children's well-being

6.2.1 | An intentional role model from 'socially normal' background facilitating experience of 'social normality' and social norms

The main aim of the mentoring role in this group, as adult role models, was to fulfil the child's social and emotional needs. They expected to contribute significantly to mentees' general development and well-being with their experiences, skills, and knowledge. They intended to see direct benefits in improvements in children's perceived unfulfilled emotional and social needs, and children's identified skills gaps.

Exposing mentees to 'social normality' was seen as the main aim and benefit of the mentoring role in children's lives. While mentees' social background was interpreted as pathological, mentors contrasted their role and its importance with the children's primary caregivers, perceived as incompetent to facilitate children's needs. They emphasised their own 'socially normal' background, its routines, skills, and experiences, and their intention to influence children with these. With this helping attitude, they stereotyped children's background and showed an insensitive approach to children in mentoring interactions. For instance, Květa focused on the hygiene conditions she perceived in the child's background and intended to change those routines using rhetoric of social normality versus social pathology.

I feel sorry for her that she is so dirty and stinky, and you can spot a smell of cigarettes from the flat ... which is absolutely inadequate for the child ... So, I decided that I am going to tell her that it is not normal to be that dirty. (Květa, January 2011).

Similarly, Viki intended to act as a role model, targeting the child's friends and attitudes towards school.

[...] to tell him what to do next because he doesn't have those friends, or because he is somehow disadvantaged ... he tends to look for friends among the kids who are skipping school ... so it is good for him to see the good sides ... (Viki, January 2011).

Marta pointed out how the discourse of social pathology versus social normality was present in the organisational approach to the mentoring intervention when it was discussed during the BBBS CZ group supervision of mentors. She explained how the nature of the mentoring role became a topic of the supervision meeting, how the caseworkers emphasised the difference in background, and how such emphasis in the mentoring relationship can benefit the child. She concluded that her potential benefit for the child was in introducing them to her experiences and perspectives of 'a socially normal environment', in contrast to the mentee's 'socially pathological background':

We discussed ... when you're talking with the child and you know she is from a problem family and that she doesn't have that much good luck in life, if it is OK that I am very well and don't have any issues, if I can tell that kid about it ... not to make her sad or jealous ... if it's good to make the child aware of the things or if we should refrain from the sensitive themes and support the child [by] just saying: 'That's good, you can do it' ... and the psychologist [BBBS supervisor] told us that children live in it and that they won't break down ... we always feel sorry for them, but they live in it [family issues] and need to hear that the world is good somewhere else and what it is supposed to look like [social normality], so they can internalise the models of how it should be ... so I realised something fundamental about my role ... I can kind of show off ... or kind of talk the way it is [in my world]. (Marta, February 2011).

After 5 months of mentoring involvement, these mentors confirmed that their perceived role was to be a role model in social norms, addressing perceived children's background needs. As the main feature of their approach was to introduce the child to the 'normal' world, they constantly, judgementally, compared their own 'good' background with the 'deficient' background of the mentees' families. And intended to address these needs with social supports in mentoring interactions forced out of their initiative. As such, we argue that they gave the children negative feedback (Deci et al., 1994). Marta summarises this approach in reflecting on the relationship, which was stopped prematurely after 6 months because of the child's and parent's dissatisfaction:

When you really see that the kid doesn't do anything all the days but just sits at home and watches TV alone ... and how she hangs out with some dicey friends on the streets around her place ... you think that she would appreciate if she went here and there and could see something new ... so it was motivating me in that [relationship], I saw the meaning there [...] She comes from a family background that is completely diametrically different from where I come from, so she could be in touch with how the people live elsewhere ... she couldn't see before that not everyone is living in such a broken, not-really-functional family and has such issues, so I intended to give her my opinions which I think are right ... and I think she was glad she could talk about things ... and realised that what happened to her was not normal really but that she did not become edged out of society that much ... and that she can still have a normal life ... and I think that would be a kind of support for her. (Marta, December 2011).

In sum, we argue that controlling mentors developed the role of an intentional role model who constantly emphasised social differences and responded to the perceived background needs out of introjected controlling motivations. Visible change in mentees would be evidence of their efficacy in the mentoring role, motivating their involvement (Brumovska & Brady, 2021; Ryan & Deci, 1985).

6.3 | Autonomy-controlling approach of mentors in mentoring interactions after 5 months

After 5 months, these mentors developed an autonomy-controlling approach to children in mentoring interactions, with features congruent with those identified by CET (Deci et al., 1994; Ryan & Solky, 1996). Control of children's autonomy was evident in mentors' approach during interactions, with the following features reported:

1. The negative evaluation of children's autonomy and competence.
2. Control of children's autonomous choice in interactions with children.
3. Control of children's autonomy in cooperation with their parents/guardians.

Controlling features were firstly evident in mentors' negative perceptions and feedback to children on their autonomy and competence. Following their negative evaluation of children, the features of control in children's autonomy (Deci et al., 1994) were maintained during the selection, negotiation, organisation, and experience of mentoring activities with the features of control of choice in cooperation with children (ibid.):

- 1) Activities were selected intentionally, in line with mentors' perception of the mentoring role with purpose to 'help' children.
- 2) Children's interests in activities were controlled and directed by mentors.
- 3) Activities were selected according to mentors' own interests.

Finally, children's autonomy was controlled by mentors in cooperation with parents/caregivers who discussed mentoring activities with mentors instead of children.

6.3.1 | Control in negative evaluation of children's autonomy and competence

Controlling mentors evaluated the children's autonomy and competence with ambivalent or negative perceptions. On the one hand, children were perceived as high in certain skills as mentors experienced these in interactions. On the other hand, according to mentors' initial perceptions of children's compliant nature (c.f. Brumovska, 2017), needs, and background, they perceived children as lacking autonomy in thinking critically about their social environment, lacking resilience when facing social risks, and easily influenced towards socially pathological behaviour.

For instance, Viki valued her mentee's caring approach to other people, yet emphasised their submissiveness, lack of autonomy and skills to face the risks in their social environment, and lower cognitive skills. Luisa described hers as being not very smart, low in autonomy, and incompetent in communication due to lack of intelligence:

He is just a really nice guy ... he would do anything for other people ... even though he's not really a smart kid, he would do first and last [for others], he would give himself away ... when I talk to him and tell him that some things are not right ... he replies, he knows that, he's not interested in it, but I think if he found a group to hang out with he would let them influence him ... even though he knows it is not right. (Viki, June and December 2011).

Marta evaluated her mentee as not having her own attitudes and opinions:

She was a flexible person, she was easy to influence and convince ... at the age of 12, she was a kid who didn't have any real opinions. (Marta, December 2011).

Finally, Luisa did recognise the mentee's autonomy and competence in skills, but only in connection with what Luisa perceived to be rather negative moral character:

She's kind of not very talkative, they say she's not a smart girl ... for instance, she told me she is not able to travel even to this place ... even though she was here a million times before ... it is quite unbelievable for me that she can't count [money] herself ... she doesn't know how much she has got ... [but] she makes it her way ... she just acts out a sad look ... and she just got it ... so she is somewhat smart and foxy in that way. (Luisa, June 2011).

6.3.2 | Control of choice in cooperation with children

Because children's financial resources were limited, autonomy-controlling mentors often perceived the range of activities as limited. They focused on low-cost leisure-time activities such as walks around the city's historical sites or in nature, meetings in the BBBS club room, or group events organised by the programme. At the same time, they often complained about the lack of low-cost leisure-time opportunities for mentoring meetings, and organised meetings in public places repetitively. For instance, one match spent almost every meeting in the public library.

Mentors often intentionally selected activities they identified as being good for children's development and needs. The enjoyability of mentoring meetings was described as limited due to lack of opportunities, repetitive nature, and the intention that the activities benefit children's identified background needs.

Some controlling mentors even expected the children to organise mentoring activities. The mentees were expected to express interest in the meetings and the mentor. Mentors described these meetings as an experience of hanging around their community without much activity or structure.

Intentionality in cooperation

Autonomy-controlling mentors focused the selection of activities on satisfying the children's background needs they had identified and addressed as part of their perceived role. Thus, the activities were primarily a means to fulfil these needs in children through the mentoring relationship while emphasising mentees' lack of autonomy and skills to justify the action:

Sometimes I have a plan, so I simply order her, and we do what I want, because I need it that way and have it planned so ... for instance I tell her: 'Manon, look, I think you've got a little issue with your reading skills. If you want to learn English, you need to know how to read well in Czech first', and she was like: 'Well, OK, let's read some book then.' So, she just reacted well with it ... and when she's shy, you need to push her to express some things, you need to be able to direct that kid ... (Marta, February and June 2011).

Control of children's choice

Controlling mentors described how they dismissed children's autonomy with the lack of options and negotiation they could facilitate in selecting activities. Negotiation reportedly took a short course, as children were not actively supported in giving their ideas or having options of activities to discuss with mentors. Activities were then selected by mentors. For instance, Barbel described how she selected the activities for the mentee, emphasising mentee's passivity in the process:

Researcher: How do you organise the activities?

Mentor: Mostly I do it myself. We don't think it up [together], but when we're finishing the meeting, we say, 'Let's go there and there next time', and then I think about it during the week ... and when we meet up again, I tell her what I thought up and ask her if she agrees with it or not ... she usually doesn't have any ideas of her own ... (Barbel, June and December 2011).

Marta generalised the perceptions of autonomy-controlling mentors regarding the challenge in selection of activities for the mentoring meetings while taking all the responsibility and control over the activity selection and organisation process:

The time I spend with her is challenging for me ... I think up something to do regarding the lack of money and the age difference. Things I'd like to do, she wouldn't enjoy ... so I must subordinate everything to her needs ... I ask her if she agrees with it [suggested activities] or not, but I decide about it to a large extent ... only when I don't know what to do with her ... it is a kind of emergency ... then she says what she wants. (Marta, June 2011).

Selecting activities of mentors' interest

Controlling mentors reported a lot of control over children's autonomy by excluding choice in decision-making over activities of children's interest (Deci et al., 1994; Ryan & Deci, 1985)—instead organising activities around their own interests, which took precedence. They expected the children's compliance:

When I ask Denisa what she would like to do, she for instance suggests that she wants to go to the club room, and so I persuaded her because it's a nice day outside and I spent all day indoors, so I don't want to be indoors again ... so I tell her we'll go there in winter, and she replies that she lets me decide what I want to choose ... so it mostly depends on my decision. (Luisa, June 2011).

6.3.3 | Control in cooperation with the parent/guardian

Finally, some of these mentors controlled children in cooperation with the parents or guardians. This was done to impose even stronger control over the child's autonomous behaviour and expressions in mentoring activities that mentors felt only weakly competent to handle.

Luisa's interactions with the guardian developed into close cooperation in selecting and organising the mentoring activities, leaving the mentee excluded from decision-making and controlled by the joint decisions of her mentor and guardian:

Usually, I am organising the activities ... I usually talk to her granny and manage meetings with her because she is reliable ... it is important for me to manage the meetings with her granny ... I also talk with Denisa, of course, if her granny gives her the phone ... but she's kind of ... it is me talking only, and Denisa only replies yes or no ... and with her granny it works well. (Luisa, December 2011).

In sum, the mentors who initiated their mentoring involvement with autonomy-controlling motivations showed intention to control children's spontaneous expressions of interests and autonomous competence through defining children's incompetence and lack of autonomy and addressing what they perceived as the children's background needs. They limited children's autonomy to pre-selected activities focused on fulfilling children's needs, with the intention to confirm the mentoring role they constructed in accordance with their initial motivations (Brumovska, 2017).

These mentors were unwilling to negotiate over activities with children but insisted on activities in their control. As this approach was intentionally targeted at children's background needs, there was no evidence of provided autonomy, competence, or enactment supports that would optimally match with children's needs (Cutrona, 2000) as expressed by children while they would seek support from their mentors at the time of the meetings (c.f. Brumovska, 2017). Thus, we argue that the benefits of mentoring were limited for mentees in these relationships. Three out of six matches were terminated prematurely out of children's dissatisfaction while another three relationships displayed low relational satisfaction after 8 months of involvement (c.f. Brumovska, 2017).

7 | AUTONOMY-SUPPORTIVE MENTORS

7.1 | Initial perceptions of mentees' needs

Autonomously motivated mentors, like controlling mentors, strongly expressed their initial helping values and attitudes. But from the outset they differed in their perception of children's needs, autonomy, and competence, and in their perceived efficacy of the mentoring role in children's life and well-being.

7.1.1 | Perceptions of needs based on experiences with children in mentoring interactions

Autonomy-supportive mentors did not emphasise the children's background needs, but perceived information about it with empathy, understanding, and willingness to support their needs as soon as these would be expressed in meetings. Thus, rather than presuming children's needs before meetings, autonomy-supportive mentors waited until the mentees expressed them during interactions. They were then ready to respond sensitively and empathetically to these needs from the outset.

Autonomy-supportive mentors were also aware of children's health issues, but perceived this information as unproblematic, emphasising the child's natural character or ability in successfully resolving the issue in the past. As a result, they developed autonomy-supportive, authentic, and judgement-free interactions from the start of the relationship as illustrated for example, in Sara's quote:

I feel like he's a boy like anyone else, from any normal family [...] he gives the impression he is happy and doesn't have any big issues [...] I don't think we should be focused on the issues, and that I should push him to talk about how he's doing at home ... so far we didn't come across any issues, anyway, he doesn't talk about what would be happening at home - and I don't ask him about it; I don't feel a need to, if he doesn't talk about it on his own ... so it's like going out for a coffee with a friend (Sára, January 2011).

Similarly, Nina didn't perceive neither expect any major issues in the mentee's behaviour caused by the mentee's background from the start of the mentoring meetings:

I think they are doing quite well, easy, totally normal family, he probably has just a few friends, so they applied for BBBS for him to make him kind of ... less shy ... he doesn't have any specific issues, he's ... just lower in self-confidence due to [health condition], it's harder for him to make social contacts ... and he [child's issue], but two years ago or so, and he didn't have any further issues since then. (Nina, February 2011).

Overall, this perception of a deficit-free mentee was common to all tracked autonomy-supportive mentors:

I feel like he's quite a happy child ... even at school, as far as I asked him ... I think he's not doing bad ... except for [child's issue] ... but I don't think it is that serious of an issue unless it comes up in the meetings ... and he was diagnosed, but I don't think it is an issue now ... he's kind of very energetic, lively, but I wouldn't call it [child's diagnosis]. (Tina, February 2011).

7.2 | Perceived role and efficacy in children's well-being

7.2.1 | Perceived neutral initial efficacy in facilitating children's needs

Autonomously motivated mentors emphasised that their interpretation of the child's needs before meetings, and intentional facilitation of children's needs in mentoring activities, were not perceived as part of their role—unless the children expressed their needs on their own. They felt that the mentees did not need them as a helper and observed that the needs reported by BBBS at referral were well managed by children at the time the mentoring meetings started. These mentors strongly refrained from making presumptions about their impact on the children's life and well-being in terms of facilitating children's needs or causing strong changes in mentees' lives. As the quotes below illustrate, they all perceived their impact to be rather neutral and uncertain. Nevertheless, with their autonomous motivation for mentoring involvement (Brumovska & Brady, 2021; Ryan & Deci, 1985), their personal good feeling and satisfaction from meetings with children was sufficient feedback for their efficacy:

I don't know if I really change him in anything ... it might [only] be that if he can experience another kind of relationship, another kind of company, it might help him to be less shy. But I don't think it would be anything significant for him; he would probably cope without it, anyway ... it would just take him longer, because he wouldn't have this experience. (Nina, June 2011).

Sara particularly connected the potential presumptions on the impact of the mentoring role on her mentee with the judgements in her approach she intentionally avoided:

Well, I feel that he just wouldn't experience those things we do together and the fun we have ... and if there is anything else in it for him, I can't presume or judge here. (Sara, December 2011).

As causing the change was not the primary goal of autonomy-supportive mentors, Ivan showed how they stayed satisfied in the mentoring role even with the uncertainty of their impact on the mentees:

I don't think I should have the potential to change something ... I need to accept things, his acting and behaviour ... as it comes up, and act naturally, not to push anything anywhere ... I think he's not ... in such troubles or in such issues in communication situations to need significant support or particular help ... it is possible that the programme is OK even for kids who only need to see a kind of older guy because he doesn't have this [in his life] ... even though he goes to play football regularly or has his grandad, it is beneficial for him to meet up with me ... how much he will benefit from that, I won't judge. I strongly believe that he will – a lot [laughs]. (Ivan, December 2011).

7.2.2 | Perceived positive efficacy in facilitating relaxation, play, and fun experiential mentoring activities for children

Importantly, supportive mentors recognised the beneficial nature of the positive mentoring bond for children, while considering the enjoyable social interactions through experiential child-centred activities to be the major benefits they could facilitate in the role. They perceived that these experiences could support mentees' skills and contribute to their positive routines, which would be transferrable to other parts of their life. Thus, as Sara expressed, facilitation of play, relaxation, and enjoyment in meetings was their main perceived contribution to the child's development and well-being, and the main aim of the mentoring role they developed:

I think it is an overall relaxation, easiness ... it is mostly about relaxation and ... fun, it's mostly fun for him ... the fact that we laugh together a lot, we have fun together, and I think he's doing things he wouldn't do otherwise ... he can switch off from everything he's experiencing in daily life ... so I think that he can relax for a while and that he can enjoy his childhood in this way ... and me with him [laughs]. (Sára, December 2011).

Similarly, Nina emphasised that the main contribution of the mentoring role was to facilitate enjoyable add-on activities and experiences in mentee's life:

He doesn't really need a mentor, but it is a plus for him that he has one ... he can go somewhere else or do different activities with different people ... I think it is interesting for him to spend time with someone older who talks with him ... and if he didn't have a mentor, he would cope well, anyway ... I think he mostly needs some add-on activities, so he doesn't stay on his own all the time ... I think he likes it, he can talk about anything with me, and no one interrupts him, so he can talk as much as he wants ... and it is probably important for him to get out of his routine. (Nina, December 2011).

This perception of the mentoring role as a positive add-on activity in mentee's life is significant in how it is diametrically different from the perception of the mentoring role in the autonomy-controlling mentors:

I feel that ... even though he has football and mates, he spends lots of time at home on his own playing PC games or watching TV, so he can go out at least once a week and we play separate games he wouldn't do with anyone else, I guess ... [if he wasn't meeting me] he probably wouldn't know how to play the game [name] that well, he would never go to aqua park, he wouldn't get paintball for his birthday ... so I hope that I change his stereotypes a little as he can get out of his neighbourhood ... (Ivan, December 2011).

7.3 | Autonomy-supportive approach of mentors in mentoring interactions after 5 months of involvement

The data further showed how autonomously motivated mentors, following their perceptions of the mentoring role, developed an autonomy-supported approach in interactions after 5 months of involvement, while supporting children's autonomy and competence in line with features previously identified in CET (Deci et al., 1994; Ryan, 1991, 1993; Ryan & Solky, 1996; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). In particular, the features of autonomy support specific to formal mentoring bonds were found as:

1. Positive autonomy and competence in children, perceived by mentors.
2. Cooperation with the provision of structure in child-centred places of mentoring meetings.
3. Provision of choice in options and negotiation in the selection of child-centred activities.

7.3.1 | Perceived positive autonomy and competence in mentees

Autonomy-supportive mentors perceived the mentees to be without major deficits in their needs caused by social background, instead focusing consistently on their strengths, abilities, interests, talents, skills, and positive characteristics when describing them throughout the 12 months of mentoring. Contrary to autonomy-controlling mentors, they valued mentees' pleasant and lively natures and strengths of character, such as resilience and coping skills, reliability, and sense of humour, as well as their intelligence, communication skills, and particular skills such as the ability to travel independently by public city transport. For instance, Ivan emphasised sense of humour he appreciated in his mentee and in their common communication:

He is cheerful, lively and sporty, and a very intelligent, good, fun boy [laughs] ... it's fun with him, he is reliable for his age, which I appreciate in him [...] and he even returns jokes with me ... he's easy ... I think he has very good social intelligence. (Ivan, May 2011).

Nina perceived and emphasised particular talents she saw and admired in her mentee from the outset of the relationship:

Leny is a 10-year-old boy who is smart, very witty, has a huge imagination, he is insecure in some ways, but when you get him on your side, he is friendly, open ... and he is a boy of action, he's good fun, I like when he's talking about things with such engagement ... he has interesting opinions, discoveries, unusual ideas ... I think he is more intelligent than his peers. I like that even though he has a disability, he doesn't see it as an issue, it's the way it is ... and he's a very easy and nice boy and it's fun with him ... I am always again and again surprised with the abilities of such a young boy, what he's capable of, I never stop being surprised. (Nina, June and December 2011).

7.3.2 | Cooperation with provision of child-centred options and structure in mentoring meetings

Because autonomy-supportive mentors considered meetings as quality and fun time facilitated for children, they suggested child-centred places for the meetings rather than specific activities. They provided a structure for options in activities of the child's interest located in these places. For instance, they mentioned playgrounds, parks, and historical sites that they felt the mentees would enjoy.

Child-centred places were often sought in the child's community to avoid complications with travel and to maintain the regularity of meetings; this was significant in establishing a regular structure for meetings. They did not hesitate to travel even a significant distance to the child's place but highlighted how enjoyable those meetings were for both parties. In this way, they could overcome any issues that arose with organising meetings and were able to organise them very regularly:

The children's cinema was nearby, so we went there, then we visited the scary forest also over there by his place, because it's all somehow very well-reachable there [...] because the communication with

his mum has been complicated and so he sometimes didn't arrive at the meeting point we arranged and stuff, so I thought I would come to his place and pick him up ... so we arranged the activities around his place, so we could avoid complicated travelling by public transport. (Sára, December 2011).

Moreover, they introduced mentees to community resources for children and young people close to their own homes, thus supporting their autonomous resourcefulness:

There is a house for children and youth close to their place, and they have a leisure-time club there ... with different leisure-time games and activities available, so we go there kind of often now ... and in summer we used to go to the park nearby and do outdoor activities ... there are different playgrounds for kids, so the time goes fast ... (Tina, December 2011).

7.3.3 | Facilitated negotiation on child-centred choices in selection of activities

Mentors supported children's autonomy with their strong focus on negotiation and dialogue over the selection of activities, always giving children a few options and a choice when they suggested activities. By firstly informing mentees about activities and then involving them in the decision-making, mentors allowed children to participate in negotiation and dialogue. By listening to the children, they encouraged them to express their interests and wishes while treating them as partners in this discussion. There was a strong focus on activities that were enjoyable for children and prioritised their interests above mentors' intentions.

Mentors also respected children's expressions of dislike about activities, while supporting their autonomy by respecting their wishes and interests. They shared enjoyment of activities with children and did not hesitate to flexibly change activities according to children's perceived interests:

I don't tend to push him into anything; we try to talk about everything and solve things together ... be it about where we're going, or in general, anyway. (Sára, January 2011).

After 5 months, supportive mentors allowed children to lead the activities while supporting children's interests in activities with empathy, atonement and understanding of the mentee's choices:

Researcher: How do you select the activities?

Ivan: After mutual negotiation. I think I usually suggest something with him being excited about it and agreeing on it or adding on and suggesting something on his own ... and skating was his idea ... because I didn't know that you could borrow the skates and skate for free there, so he organised everything on his own, or ... he chose it and negotiated ... he told me that and we negotiated it together ... and I surely have some ideas too, so we discuss it together. (Ivan, May 2011).

In summary, mentors developed interactions that included mentees as equal partners in negotiation, decision-making, cooperation, and autonomous expressions of interests. Mentors thus supported children's frames of reference, that is, their autonomy and competence (Deci et al., 1994; Ryan, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 1985; Ryan & Solky, 1996). As further analysis showed, the relationships with mentors' autonomy-supportive approach reported events of optimally matched enactment of social supports (Cutrona, 2000) and support in mentees' competence

with optimal challenge in mentees' skills provided in mutual play; and positive feedback on mentees' skills in mentoring interactions (c.f. Brumovska, 2017; Deci et al., 1994).

8 | CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

To address the research aim and question of this paper, we identified and compared three themes found as common in mentors' experiences tracked over 12 months of mentoring involvement. In particular, mentors' initial perceptions of (1) the mentoring role; and (2) mentors' role in facilitating mentees' needs and well-being were analysed as 'Mentors' initial perceptions of the mentoring role' in this study. Furthermore, the analysis included the common themes in mentors' approach reported after 5 months of involvement: (1) Perception of mentees' character, autonomy, and competence; (2) Approach to mentoring interactions. Application of CET (Deci et al., 1994; Ryan, 1991, 1993; Ryan & Solky, 1996) showed that mentors, similarly to other significant adults, display features of both, autonomy support and autonomy control in mentoring interactions and thus develop both, supportive beneficial mentoring bonds; and controlling, not-so-beneficial mentoring relationships. We identified features of the autonomy-supportive and autonomy-controlling approach in mentoring interactions developed by mentors over 1 year of mentoring involvement, with related initial perceptions of the mentoring role (Deci et al., 1994; Ryan & Solky, 1996). Six out of 10 tracked relationships developed features of autonomy control in the mentors' approach while four mentors showed an autonomy-supportive approach to mentees (Deci et al., 1994).

The autonomy controlling approach of mentors was characterised by initial judgemental perceptions of mentees, intentions to control mentees' autonomy perceived as undesirable, and, as a result, low relational satisfaction. Mentors who developed approach with autonomy-controlling features perceived children's needs based on the perceived insufficiency of mentees' background (parents, other family members incompetent to foster mentees' needs). Mentors subsequently thought their role was to facilitate children's needs they identified as thwarted by their deficient background. They developed a role of a mentor who intended to showcase 'social normality' and foster social norms in the mentees through mentoring interactions. After 5 months, these mentors regarded mentees as young people with a lack of autonomy, or as questionable and compromised in their character regarding their autonomous behaviour. In addition, they perceived a lack of various skills they picked on and focused to develop in mentees intentionally in mentoring activities.

As a result, they intended to control mentees' autonomy that was perceived as directed towards socially undesirable or even delinquent behaviour. Instead, they focused on the facilitation of activities and interactions directed towards fostering mentees' identified needs, enhancing mentees' lack of skills, or controlling mentees' autonomy in behaviour with various practices in interactions, including a selection of activities with prescribed intention to help mentees; activities selected to control children's interests, in coalition with mentees' parents/guardians. These relationships were found irregular after 8 months while dissatisfying for mentees who tended to break from the bond before 12 months of mentoring involvement (c.f. Brumovska, 2017). The benefits of this approach for mentees' empowerment, well-being and overall positive development are questionable.

On the other hand, mentors who developed approach with features of autonomy-support primarily perceived their role as an enjoyable add-on to mentees' daily experiences and interactions. They focused on the facilitation of mentoring meetings with an emphasis on enjoyability, fostering relaxation, fun, and play for mentees. Mentees and their interests were at the centre of the perceived purpose of the mentoring role. At the same time, mentors initially didn't base their mentoring role on the presumed mentees' background needs but perceived them as healthy young people they befriended in enjoyable mentoring interactions unless mentees expressed their needs directly during the mentoring meetings. Furthermore, these mentors were attuned to positive perceptions of mentees' skills and interests and perceived mentees as competent, pleasant, skilful, and engaged young people with unique interests

from the beginning of their interactions. In mentoring interactions, mentors focused on fostering regular meetings, structured around children's interests, and preferably organised in children's communities, thus creating an organised, predictable and safe space for mentees. Mentors approached children by providing several options of activities, selected with a child-centred focus—with children's interests in mind. Thus, they allowed mentees to negotiate and select activities of their interest. Increasingly, mentees felt empowered to exercise their autonomy in these negotiations and came up with their own suggestions on activities that mentors subsequently organised in the mentoring meetings. Mentors thus succeeded in supporting mentees' autonomy by allowing children to negotiate mentoring activities with them and select and suggest activities of their own interest.

This study particularly showed that the youth-centred autonomy-supportive empathetic playful atonement in mentors' approach with positive perceptions of mentees from the outset of the involvement developed a strong mentoring bond. By giving mentees voice and space in mentoring interactions (Lundy, 2007), mentors supported mentees' autonomy and competence; and built trust, closeness, and relational satisfaction; facilitated individual empowerment of mentees and related individual benefits of the formal mentoring bond evident in the literature (Brumovska, 2017; DuBois et al., 2011; Rhodes, 2005; Spencer, 2006; Spencer et al., 2017).

Similar features to the identified autonomy-controlling and autonomy-supportive approaches in mentors were found in previous studies. For instance, several features of Developmental and Prescriptive relationships (Morrow & Styles, 1995) were found also in the present study. Similarly, the previous discussion on the developmental or instrumental focus of formal mentoring bonds with the 'conventional' (adult/future-oriented) or 'playful' (youth/presence-oriented) purpose of the relationships (Karcher & Nakkula, 2010) or discussion on Baart's (2002) model of 'Intervention' and 'Presence' approach of practitioners in social work, applied to the approach of formal mentors (Brady & Brumovska, 2017) also concern the results of this study.

This study contributes to the current debate on formal mentoring relational characteristics and quality features. We argued that the features of mentors' initial perceptions of the mentoring role are prerequisites for the support or control of mentees' autonomy in future mentoring interactions. Mentors supported or controlled mentees' autonomy according to the initial perceptions of the mentoring role and mentees. Importantly, mentors' positive perceptions of mentees and their abilities, talents, and positive character; and mentors' role perceived as a facilitator of relaxation, play and shared fun from the beginning of mentoring involvement were prerequisites of developed autonomy-supportive approach in mentoring interactions.

9 | RECOMMENDATION FOR EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE OF FORMAL YOUTH MENTORING

Comparing the approaches of mentors and their features and impact on mentees under the themes mentors share in their mentoring experience is important for awareness of the nature and variability of formal mentoring bonds. High-quality formal mentoring bonds with benefits for vulnerable mentees can be developed, but it is not automatic (Brumovska, 2017; Coley, 2003; Morrow & Styles, 1995; Spencer, 2007a). This study shows the detailed risks of formal mentoring bonds evident in a mentor's approach that is judgemental of, and disrespectful to, a mentee's background, autonomy, and competence. It thus offers the mentoring intervention themes that professionals should be aware of in recruitment, training and supervision of mentors.

An honest in-depth regular long-term reflection on the mentoring motivation, expectations, experiences and perceptions of mentoring practice; perceived satisfaction in the mentoring role and relationship; expected and perceived benefits of mentoring bonds; as well as overall intentions of the mentoring programme, awareness of the language used in the discourse it operates and aims its benefits for mentees in—is necessary for all mentoring stakeholders to practice (including caseworkers and managers of mentoring interventions, mentors, mentees and parents, mentoring researchers)—to facilitate relationships beneficial primarily for mentees—vulnerable children and young people in our societies.

10 | LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The fieldwork of this study was conducted between October 2010 and January 2012 (c.f. Brumovska, 2017). The reported data are thus a decade old. Nevertheless, although this study was conducted in the Czech context, its results suggest that features of mentors' autonomy-supportive and autonomy-controlling approaches may occur universally across cultures and contexts as a psychological trait of youth-adult relationships (Coley, 2003; Morrow & Styles, 1995; Spencer, 2007a). Or as CET shows, as traits of adults' approach to children and young people, while here this principle is applied to formal youth mentoring bonds. In addition, the discussion showed that similar relational types were identified previously in the literature. This study add-on further details to this volume of knowledge.

To date, the longitudinal design of the reported study is still scarce in the field. A similar study with a qualitative, in-depth, longitudinal design and a focus on relational experiences and dynamics in formal youth mentoring internationally would help identify contemporary mentoring themes, and thereby compare and validate the themes reported here and previously across contexts and timeframes. Even though the mentors' experiences were explored before (Weiler et al., 2014), it would be beneficial to explore in depth the shared themes of the mentoring relational and individual experiences across temporal, cultural, organisational, and social contexts. Future research could apply self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 1985) to compare the relational experiences of mentoring matches across cultures and so explore this argument in depth.

The research was conducted in the Czech BBBS CZ mentoring programme, which has been operated according to BBBS International standards, modified to the Czech context from 1990s up to these days (Brizova, 2018). The organisational and programme's operation and dynamics were discussed as factors that impact mentoring results on the same topic in different programmes (DuBois et al., 2011). This study shows that more studies on how the organisational and mentoring intervention's discourse, mission and aims; defined mentoring roles and practice with mentors and mentees; and intended outcomes of mentoring intervention in organisational view relate to the mentors' perceptions of the mentoring role, approach to mentees in mentoring interactions; and characteristics, dynamics and perceived benefits of formal mentoring bonds should be further conducted in the field.

Overall, the research on mentoring programmes could explore how the practices of programmes align with good evidence-based practice in the field of youth mentoring, in both, the local context and international comparison, taking local context as a subject of exploration and discussion. The local adjustments to the general evidence-based good practice based on the research results in the field should be addressed and discussed in the future studies to gain more insights on the contextual cultural, societal, and systemic factors that impact and moderate the quality of mentoring relationships, and thus mentoring programmes.

During the past 10 years, the mentoring interventions display shifts in approaches to facilitating mentoring bonds, with mentees actively participating in the selection and matching process. At the same time, the traditional approaches remain in formal mentoring practice. Thus, it is important to reflect on the themes of mentors' experiences and recognise and address the risks in mentors' approaches to children. While we argue that the mentoring relationships that will be autonomy-supportive, empowering, and beneficial for mentees' well-being should remain the aim of all youth mentoring interventions, the results of this paper show the necessity of research and discussion not only on positive supportive and empowering features but also on the complex relational processes in formal mentoring bonds. It strengthens the case that a complex approach to youth mentoring relationships and interventions is necessary to facilitate efficient practice, which includes a discussion of the inherent risks of formal mentoring and how to prevent these.

This paper clearly showed that experiences and perceptions of mentoring participants themselves are important for capturing quality and facilitating benefits for mentees, that is, vulnerable children and youths. Knowledge of 'what works' in mentors' and mentees' experiences then argues for focus on support of autonomy and competence, empowerment, resilience and mentees' overall well-being as ultimate benefits of formal mentoring interventions. More research, reflection, conceptualisation, and in-depth discussion on the nature of

mentoring processes and principles, and their suitable application in formal mentoring interventions of different forms are still needed in the field.

Prospective studies with qualitative research designs can further explore mentoring experiences and perceptions, with the active participation of mentees, which will offer further in-depth exploration of mentoring processes and benefits for application in practice in the traditional as well as in new formal mentoring approaches. For instance, better knowledge of young people's experiences and perspectives of their natural mentors across contexts could further inform new youth-initiated mentoring programmes that would aim to support and enhance existing supportive mentoring bonds. This knowledge could also inform programmes that would train all young people in mentoring skills to initiate and strengthen existing mentoring relationships in their natural social networks on their own.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data reported in this article are not freely available nor deposited as no consents were granted in this regard by research respondents.

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