Relational matters: A review of the impact of school experience on mental health in early adolescence

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The review of this area posited the notion of 'the supportive school' as important and one key element, the notion of school connectedness. Within that the role of relationships is identified as significant. This paper explores the part played by relationships in schools. The paper draws on a review of 133 papers published mainly in the last 15 years. Relationships between teachers and pupils and pupils' peer relationships are identified as the key ones. The main ways in which school-based relationships impact upon mental health are explored. First, in terms of the relationship to academic outcomes; second, the relationship between social support, feelings of emotional well-being or distress, and teacher-pupil relationships; and finally the relationship between school connectedness and mental health outcomes. The authors argue for greater attention to be paid to the interconnections between the relationships with young people and their emotional and academic well-being. The paper concludes with the implications for schools and teachers of these findings and an argument for an acknowledgement of the importance of the social goals of education.

Schooling does matter greatly. Moreover, the benefits can be surprisingly long lasting … Schools are about social experiences as well as scholastic learning. (Rutter, 1991)

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T IS NEARLY three decades since research showed the power of schools to make a difference to educational outcomes (Rutter et al., 1979) and two decades since the scope widened to examine matters of psychosocial development (Rutter, 1991). Recently the Nuffield Foundation[1] has commissioned a re-examination of the research on these elements and this paper reports an element of this, the role of relationships at school in mental health. We explore the empirical research, reported in the last 10 to 15 years, on the influence of school experience, particularly relationships, on young people's mental health and then look at the implications for practice and policy.

By mental health we mean a young person's ability to: develop psychologically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually; have a sense of personal well-being; sustain satisfying personal relationships; develop a sense of right and wrong; and resolve problems as well as learning from them (Mental Health Foundation, 1999). The period that the review focuses upon is early adolescence, i.e. between 10 and 14. This is an interesting time period since it encompasses the transition from pre-teenage years to teenage years and from primary to secondary school. It is a time when young people are developmentally concerned with increasing their autonomy and with shifting the balance in their relationships with peers and adults. Roeser et al. (2000) describe this as a highly potent period. 'Nowhere in the life span other than in infancy is the interplay of individual and collective factors in the composition of human life more pronounced than in the early adolescent years.' (p.443)

There is an underlying assumption in many policy initiatives that schools do play a major part in young people's well-being. The Government's recent *Every Child Matters* legislation (Department for Education and Skills, 2003) places a duty of well-being on schools

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[1] For further information go to www.nuffieldfoundation.org the Changing Adolescence programme.

and this responsibility for taking care of young people's mental health is embedded within many policies (Department of Health, 2004). Programmes such as the 'Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning in Schools' (SEAL) (Department for Education and Skills, 2005) presume that teachers and schools have a part to play in developing young people's well-being. In 2005 the Good Childhood Inquiry surveyed around 8000 14- to 16-year-olds from across the UK (Pople, 2009, pp.17–18). The survey reports that children often 'spontaneously mentioned' school and education when asked about 'the ingredients of a good life'. What young people valued highly was time with friends from whom they derived 'intimacy, support and pleasure'. The absence of such friendships was felt keenly by a minority. Equally valued was having 'good teachers' who were 'kind and supportive' 'passionate about their subjects' and who made lessons 'interesting and fun'. They were also concerned about bullying and the 'disruptive behaviour of other pupils'. Exams and schoolwork were also a source of stress. So young people perceived school as playing a role in well-being. The factors mentioned by the pupils convey a strong sense of the school as a social institution where the social experiences referred to by Rutter in the earlier quotation emerge as important.

We wanted to explore more deeply the evidence on the relationship between school experience and mental health outcomes. We argue that schools should be involved in developing emotional well-being and that, as Resnick (2005) has written, this involves 'the intentional, deliberative process of providing support, relationships, experience and opportunities that promote positive outcomes for young people.'

We identified several interlocking areas of activity and experience in schools which may be particularly important in influencing young people's well-being and the major one was the notion of 'school connectedness'. This concept is relatively recent as a term, although its components are of much longer standing. As the US National Research Council (2003) put it: 'If students are to invest themselves in the forms of mastery required by schools, they must perceive the general enterprise of schooling as legitimate, deserving of their committed effort and honouring them as respected members.' 'School connectedness' provides a summary way of describing a nexus of activities and experiences including relationships between peers and with teachers, levels of pupil satisfaction with what they are experiencing, feelings of membership of the 'learning community' and aspects of participation and student voice. Many of these areas have been researched in some detail over the years and ideas about their nature and salience are relatively well-developed. This article will focus on the primacy of relationships in this area. We explore the ways in which relationships are important, how they are important and the implications for policy and practice.

The review strategy

We addressed this question of the relationship between school experience and mental health by entering the following terms into the major bibliographic search engines (both inside and outside education), paying particular attention to those aspects of social and emotional development and behaviour which previous reviews have linked to schooling. One-hundred-and-thirty-three papers were reviewed. The majority of these papers were from the US, with some from the UK and Australia.

Search terms used:
- Adolescent Mental Health;
- Friendship in Adolescence;
- Adolescent mental health in schools;
- School Connectedness;
- Pupil-teacher relationship;
- Bullying, Adolescence;
- School Preventative Programmes Adolescence;
- School Exclusion;
- School, emotion, adolescence;
- School, emotion, attachment.

We paid particular attention to studies in middle schools or those which conducted research on young people within the 10 to 14 age range. We drew on papers in psychology, health, medicine, education and criminology.

As stated earlier, the power of relationships emerged as a major factor in early adolescents' mental health and so the first and major part of the paper explores the research on relationships between teachers and pupils, pupils' peer relationships and mental health. The authors also examine the theoretical frameworks within which this research has been framed and in particular notions of development, attachment and connectedness or engagement. The paper concludes with a discussion on the implications of this emphasis on relationships and their role in mental health.

Background

Early research in the areas of resilience, school effectiveness and 'at risk' or vulnerable groups of young people identified the importance of teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil relationships. This research focused on the relationship between the adults in children's social worlds and the influences of and interactions with family, peers and other social organisations. Schools were identified as important sites in relation to mental health, and the academic as well as the psychosocial aspects of school were seen as very important to adolescents' healthy development (Rutter, 1991; Howard et al., 1999). Significant factors in protecting young people psychosocially and helping to promote their well-being include the ability of children to develop coping strategies, for example, self-efficacy, the ability to self-reflect, self-reliance, maintaining a positive outlook and problem solving (Vostanis, 2007). Also important is children's positive experiences of, and engagement in, secure relationships, educational attainment, and friendships. So the significance of schools as places which have an impact on mental health had been established. The interconnections between these elements in a school setting are also pertinent and research has shown that they are highly connected. This will be explored further later in this paper.

The importance of teacher-pupil relationships

Over the last decade reviews of research have acknowledged the central role and importance of teacher-pupil relationships to emotional well-being in schools (Durlak & Wells, 1997; Weare & Gray, 2003). However, despite the acknowledgments of their importance there has been a lack of detailed exploration and a neglect of this as a focus for policy or practice development.

The research undertaken is largely from the US, with some European and some Australian research. There is a need to be cautious about directly or simplistically transferring findings from the US. Juvonen and colleagues (2004) report that 'the international comparisons … show that US middle-school-age pupils have negative perceptions of their learning conditions. Compared with their peers in other countries they reported the highest levels of emotional and physical problems, viewed the climate of their schools most negatively and considered the peer culture in school to be unkind and unsupportive.' On the other hand US pupils reported more favourably on levels of teacher support, parental involvement and 'academic pressure'. However, the recent UNICEF study of child well-being in rich countries (UNICEF, 2007) show great similarities in the rankings of the UK and the US, suggesting more similarities between these two countries than between the UK and European countries. The research studies are often large correlational studies which focus on the individual characteristics and conditions of young people in school settings. Few studies can be said to be deeply rooted in educational settings or interrogating the interrelationship in detail, a big gap in the research.

Why do relationships matter?

In this section we outline the importance of the concept of school connectedness for

young people's well-being and the role that relationships play within that.

School connectedness and engagement

The ability of a child to connect to school during adolescence has been shown to be a key protective factor and one that lowers the likelihood of health-risk behaviour, while also enhancing positive educational outcomes (Resnick et al., 1993; Resnick, 2000; Glover et al., 1998; Blum & Libbey, 2004; Libbey, 2004). Several factors relate to young adolescents' sense of motivation and achievement at school, including parental support (Bowen & Bowen, 1998; Rosenfeld et al., 2000) and peer support (Rosenfeld et al., 2000). Early adolescents' engagement with school is instrumental to their social and cognitive development, leading to sense of achievement and high self-esteem, but it is also fundamental to their well-being (Finn, 1993; Newmann, 1992; Marks, 2000). Young adolescents who are disengaged from school, and have poor relationships with peers and teachers, are likely to have a higher risk of displaying anxiety or depressive symptoms, are more likely to use drugs and engage in socially disruptive behaviours, and are less likely to complete secondary schools (Resnick et al., 1997; Bond et al., 2004; Barclay & Doll, 2001; Doll & Hess, 2001; Marcus & Sanders-Reio, 2001; Catalano et al., 1996). What may be occurring here is that the exclusion or inclusion of young people in school affects their networks of relationships as well as their opportunities to engage in anti social or risky behaviours. There may also be a sense of rejection and this may have to be engaged with in terms of identity, as studies by Matza (1999) suggest. It may also be the beginning of identification with a marginal identity.

To have a sense of connectedness with school it is suggested that a child should feel that they belong in some way to the school (Finn 1993, 1997). Children who feel connected to school, and feel cared for by people at school, report a higher degree of well-being (Resnick et al., 1997; Eccles et al.,

1997; Steinberg, 1996; McNeely et al., 2002). Smith (2006) in a study of youth transitions and crime in Edinburgh emphasises the role of teacher-pupil relationships in this attachment to school.

> 'Attachment to school is related to young people's behaviour more widely in school and more widely to delinquent and criminal conduct. The most important dimension is attachment to teachers, but the belief that school success will bring later reward is also important.' (p.4)

Here we see the strong connections in the web of connectedness. Attachment to adults who care is at the centre of engagement with school and through the school with society. It suggests an identification with social organisations through attachment.

This emphasis on the power of positive teacher-pupil relationships is mirrored in studies on feelings of self-esteem and depressions (Reddy et al., 2003) as is the connection between social inclusion and well-being. Whilst the majority of children have a positive relationship with their school, a significant minority do not report a sense of connectedness or engagement (Murray & Greenberg, 2000), although this is a complex picture and trends are difficult to ascertain. The Ofsted TellUs surveys do not ask directly about engagement, but do ask about whether pupils enjoy school. In 2007, 58 per cent replied that they did either 'always' or 'most of the time,' and in 2008, 50 per cent were in these categories. These findings suggest that there is a relationship between young people's social connections to school, their operation in their social worlds and their academic outcomes.

Academic outcomes

Relationships matter because they affect young people's connection to school, with ensuing consequences, but also because they affect academic outcomes. Research also emphasises the nexus of connections between matters of well-being, academic achievement and pupils' motivation and engagement. Emotional well-being is enhanced by academic achievement and

good teaching, as academic achievement is dependent on 'an ability to meet social as well as academic challenges' (Wentzel, 1998, p.202). Earlier research, particularly that by Rutter (1991) and Eccles and Midgley (1989), showed the impact of school success on later social development and these findings are reinforced in more recent research.

Roeser and colleagues (2000) studied mental health interventions and concluded that: 'Perhaps the best mental health intervention teachers can implement in middle schools is good teaching' (p.458). Since there is a complex dynamic between social, emotional and academic development in school, they argue for the power of good teaching integrating all elements. Their explanation is that feeling academically competent and valuing school are 'two intrapsychic resources that may help youth with poor mental health overcome other life adversities that often threaten the attainment of a good education' (ibid, p.457). Interest in school can be a powerful motivational construct; it is related to persistence (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 1998; Deci, 1992), and to achievement (Wentzel, 1998).

Many of the factors that are related to success in school are also factors that play a part in shaping emotional well-being, i.e. persistence at tasks, having positive goals, feeling included in a social group and in a worthwhile enterprise, feelings of competence and safety, developing problem solving capacities, having a sense of efficacy. When exploring the key factors in motivation and success at school, relationships with teachers emerge as central and play a particular part in emotional well-being (Wentzel, 1998; Roeser et al., 2000; Weare & Gray, 2003). Wentzel argues that social support is a key variable for all pupils, not just vulnerable or minority groups. She also warns against generalising to all age groups as she feels that middle school pupils are a particular group. Other recent UK research (Mayall, 2007) has emphasised young adolescents' desire for positive pupil-teacher relationships. As Rudduck and Flutter (2004) have

argued, what was striking about teachers identified by young people as 'good' was that 'the qualities that mattered to pupils tended to be as much about how they were *treated* as how they were taught.' So academic outcomes, social support, and relationships are deeply interconnected. Research also connects them to mental health outcomes.

Emotional well-being and distress
An area that has been researched more in the last decade is the relationship between social support, feelings of emotional well-being or distress, and teacher-pupil relationships. Roeser et al. (2000) in concluding a meta review wrote:

> The theoretical argument is straightforward: to the extent that adolescents perceive teacher and school staff as providing them with opportunities to develop their academic and social competencies, to exercise autonomous control over aspects of their learning and to feel care and supported during learning, adolescents' perceptions of their academic competence, their valuing of school and their emotional well-being should all be enhanced. (p.458)

Perceived levels of teacher support appear to be particularly important with respect to mental health outcomes, although clearly causal directions need to be handled with care. Research into emotional well-being and support often studies pupils' perceptions of support by teachers (Roeser et al., 2000; Reddy et al., 2003). These studies have shown that pupils' perceptions of support are key and that whether these perceptions correspond to actual levels of support is not the important thing. '… It is not the support experiences themselves, but the cognitive representations of providers as available and supportive, that influence outcomes' (Reddy et al., 2003, p.122).

Perceived teacher support is important in many ways: it is related to depression and self-esteem (Reddy et al., 2003; Roeser et al., 2000) and is particularly important in 'the

initiation, escalation and reduction of participation in six adolescent health-risk behaviours' (McNeely & Falci, 2004). Perceived teacher support reliably predicts changes in psychological adjustment. 'In particular, students who perceived increasing levels of teacher support evidenced corresponding decreases in depression and increases in self-esteem. Likewise perceptions of decreasing teacher support corresponded with increases in depression and losses in self-esteem' (Reddy et al., 2003, p.133). There are also links between perceived availability of teacher support and increased motivation to learn and better mental health over time (Roeser et al., 2000).

Pupils feel that support from teachers declines over time and this is to be expected as adolescents develop. However, Reddy et al. note that 'although these decrements may be explained in part by normal developmental changes, the less voluntary aspects of this loss of teacher support are cause for concern' (Reddy et al., 2003, p.135). Harden et al. (2001) also reported concerns from young people about teachers not being a good source of emotional support or self-esteem. 'Young people identified few school-related facilitators of their mental health and relations with teachers tended to be described in negative terms' (Harden et al., 2001, p.147). Young people saw their peers as supportive and these relationships are focused on in detail later in this paper. Harden et al. (ibid) also found a lack of consultation with young people on the barriers to and facilitators of mental health, although they had very clear views. There was an identified need to advance interventions that aimed to improve social relations between teachers and young people. Young people identified three major aspects of school life as barriers or facilitators to their mental health: academic achievement and engagement in learning; the boredom of school, and the way teachers behave. There are similarities between the conclusions of this review and the previously discussed findings of research on resilience.

Many studies show that the majority of adolescents in school do feel supported by their teachers and that they work in environments that supported meaningful learning, supported improvement, mastery and autonomy. However, 'the opposite is also true' (Roeser et al., 2003, p.463). There are large groups of young people who do not experience the aforementioned and who demonstrate the most social and academic problems.

It would also seem that the 10 to 14 age range is particularly important developmentally and that at this age the power of relationships is amplified, as is the impact of relationships on those who are vulnerable in mental health terms. Much of the literature emphasises that it is the disaffected and disengaged child that needs particular support from teachers, but the needs of this group will not be focused on in detail here. What we can conclude here is that the influence of teachers is very powerful for *all* pupils and can cause high levels of distress or reduce them (Roeser et al., 1998). It also impacts upon academic and social outcomes. It is a model that is human and social. Learning, relating and belonging are all highly interrelated to well-being and attainment. The fragmented, cellular, initiative driven approach which is characteristic of many current schools and curriculum runs counter to this model of relationships as central to schooling. We now explore more deeply what we can learn from research about the important characteristics of teacher-pupil relationships. What of the nature of the support?

How do they matter?
In the evidence we see that the aspects of these relationships that are important relate generally to a sense of respect as a person and a sense of agency within the relationship.

In the studies that focus on pupils' perceptions, the valued characteristics of the relationships are the following: perceived support or caring; perceived fairness;

respect, trust and being listened to; feelings of competence; engagement in decision making or agency; acting on the pupil's behalf or intervening, and being positive.

The importance of perceived support has already been focused upon and it has been argued (Resnick et al., 1997; Roeser et al., 2000) that this support enables adolescents to feel safe and to feel that they belong. Young people struggling to explore adult relationships can depend on teachers to be more of an objective outsider. They learn about themselves and relationships through relating to teachers and this perceived support is related to self-esteem and depressive feelings. Juvonen (2007) has emphasised the relationship between perceived support and educational risk, as others have emphasised the link to emotional risk (Roeser et al., 1998). Johnson (2008) and Juvonen (2007) also emphasise the importance of perceived fairness in these relationships, which in turn links to the development of trust. Caring is not solely demonstrating caring for the young person as a person but is also linked to caring for their academic progress (Johnson, 2007). The relationship is academic, social and personal. Respect for the other is a key element too and is demonstrated through listening (Weare & Gray, 2003; Johnson, 2008).

The other characteristics are related to autonomy and agency. Research studies show that pupils value engagement in decision making and processes within the relationship that allow for some autonomy, as fits with the developmental needs of early adolescents. Johnson (2008) also emphasises the agency of the teacher, i.e. the teacher intervening on behalf of or in the best interests of the pupils' well-being. He argues that conceptions of teachers are strongly action oriented, and that children have high expectations of teachers' levels of efficacy and power to influence. Australian pupils valued an emphasis on the positive or on interrupting negative cognitions (ibid).
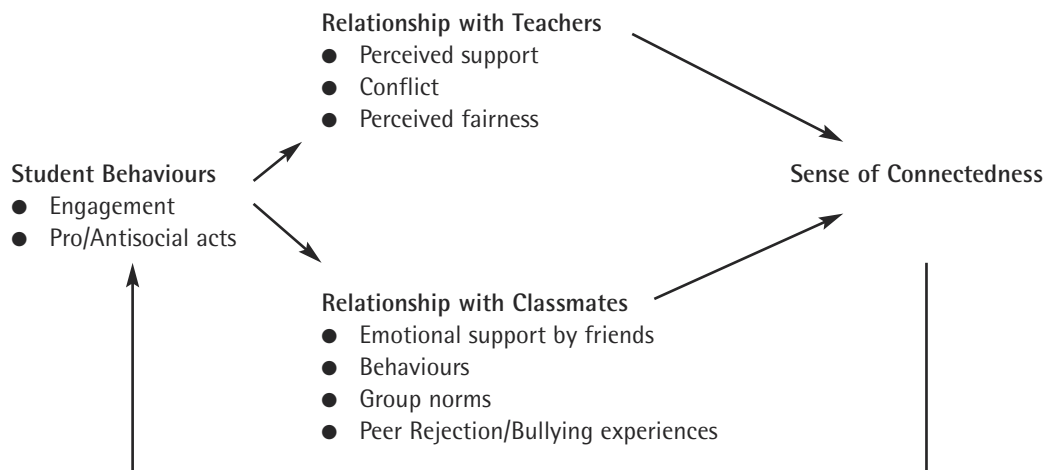
So the power of certain qualities in teacher-pupil relationships has the capacity to enhance well-being or not. Juvonen (2007) warns against over emphasising the relationships alone and Figure 1 is a model of how the different elements may interact.

The importance of pupil-pupil relationships

Considerable research has also been carried out into the importance of both family and peers to children in early adolescence (Booth-LaForce et al., 2005; Dunn, 1991, 1996, 2004) and here we focus on the importance of peers. Attachment theory has been shown to have an influence on the way in which children can relate to others (Booth-LaForce et al., 2005; Bowlby, 1979). Where there are complications in relationships with adults or parents Booth-LaForce et al. (2005) suggest that friendship can replace the inadequacy, or lack, of family support and have a direct affect on the psychosocial functioning of children in early adolescence. The ability to form friends, especially in school, appears to have a direct effect on how children cope with crisis, and their levels of well-being. Research indicates that children with an understanding of the emotional needs of others are able to form better and more intimate relationships (Dunn & Cutting, 1999; Dunn, 2004; Berndt, 1981; Douvan & Adelson, 1966). Buhrmester's research (1990) is particularly interesting in that it asked adolescents to report on their experience of their friends, and vice versa. Children rated by friends as compassionate and with the ability to share intimate experiences were more likely to feel at ease socially and experience less depression. Buhrmester (1990) argues that in childhood friendship centres on play, which includes sharing and co-operation. If children do not develop these skills in middle childhood, the transition to adolescence becomes more difficult, and could mean that the adolescent comes to feel isolated at a time when they most need the intimacy of support and understanding from peers.

Figure 1: A proposed framework summarising the associations among pupil behaviour, school–based relationships, and sense of connectedness.
(Adapted from 'Sense of Belonging, Social Relationships, and School Functioning', by J. Juvonen. In P.A. Alexander & P.H. Winne (Eds., 2006), *Handbook of Educational Psychology* (2nd ed.), Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.)

Relationship with Teachers
- Perceived support
- Conflict
- Perceived fairness

Student Behaviours
- Engagement
- Pro/Antisocial acts

Sense of Connectedness

Relationship with Classmates
- Emotional support by friends
- Behaviours
- Group norms
- Peer Rejection/Bullying experiences

Why do pupil–pupil relationships matter?

Berndt points out that early adolescents 'are not treated as children, but they are not treated as adults either' (Berndt, 1982, p.1447) and, therefore, children at this age are more likely to turn to each other for support. Research by Larson and colleagues (Larson, 2002; Larson et al., 1996) based on self-report has shown that early adolescents are more likely to spend time talking to friends than any other single activity, and Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1977) show that children at this age are most happy when talking to peers. Early adolescents regard close friends as a source of comfort and a place where concerns and feelings can be expressed (Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990; Azmitia & Lippman, 1999a); children at this age are especially likely to share intimate thoughts and feelings (Berndt, 1981; Douvan & Adelson, 1966). The evidence appears to suggest that girls are likely to share more intimate exchanges than boys (ibid). Mannarino (1978, 1979), however,

found that both male and female adolescents with a best friend whom they regarded as consistently available also reported higher feelings of self-esteem than those without a close friendship. It is interesting to note that the deterioration of friendship at this age has been viewed as a natural process, as friends drift apart or simply do not see each other anymore because of the change of school (Azmitia & Lippman, 1999b).

How do pupil-pupil relationships matter?

The way children form and maintain friendships in early adolesence, and the interaction they have with larger groups, is believed to have a significant role in adolescents' psychosocial development (Coleman & Hendry, 1999). Dunn (1996, 2004) in particular has written extensively on the importance of friendship and emotional communication in middle childhood. Dunn (2004) describes a teenager who took part in the London research thinking back to the time when she was 10 and her parents split

up. The 15-year-old recalled that it was at this time her friends became immensely important. 'I was glad I had spent the last eight years of my life with these people because they understood what to do and how to do it, to make me happy. I felt such a sensation of sticking together' (2004, p.70). Friends then can act as a buffer between parents and children, especially at times of conflict or trauma.

The notion of popularity is important to adolescents; the group effect can be both reassuring and allow a sense of experimentation. Coleman and Hendry (1999, p.150) argue that 'crowds provide secondary-school pupils with frequent opportunities to experiment with their identity while maintaining a sense of group belonging.' They point out, however, that some children can be unpopular, and that their lack of social encounters means that they do not experience the psychosocial exchanges needed to achieve greater social skills.

Peer friendship can also have a negative effect on adolescent behaviour. Steinberg and Manahan (2007) found that between the ages of 10 and 14 there were no age differences in resistance to peer influence, resulting in sometimes destructive behaviour, but that resistance rose steadily as adolescents became older, more autonomous, and followed their own values and judgment. It could be argued, therefore, that help and support is needed at an earlier age, before or at the onset of early adolescence.

Cotterell (2007) writes 'the fundamental task of schools is to create a community where students feel they belong and that their contribution is valued' (p.199). Many adolescents then prefer to turn to other adolescents rather than other adults (e.g. school personnel) when seeking support for emotional or traumatic events. Cowie (1998, 1999), Cotterell (2007), and Bosacki and Astington (1999) suggest that peers may be more important in early adolescent's social lives than teachers.

Final reflections

It is not new to argue that relationships matter but the body of evidence is now quite large and powerful. We can conclude that the connections between people in schools are a driving force in shaping engagement with school. This sense of belonging influences well-being, academic outcomes and social development, short and long term. All these aspects are interrelated and disentangling them is like untying a spider's web. The interconnections between these elements are important and complex: they are not to be ignored. They reinforce Rutter's (1991) insistence that schools are powerful institutions which influence social development and that there is a need to have appropriate social goals. We can also conclude that relationships with teachers and pupils in schools are potentially powerful for *all* pupils, and particularly so for the more emotionally vulnerable.

So engaging with the promotion of positive mental health for young people entails building communities in schools in which young people can have sustaining and meaningful relationships, which they perceive as supportive. These perceptions emerge as important in influencing well-being. The evidence we have reviewed brings into question an individual programmatic response as a primary strategy for the enhancement of well-being. It suggests that we need to move beyond the individualistic conception embodied in many of these research designs and in programmes that suggest that reshaping young people is the way forward.

What is missing from the studies we reviewed is the complexity of schools as social institutions and the interplay of these factors. We need more than correlational studies to help us understand in greater depth why relationships matter so much. We also see that issues of gender, class and power and values play their part in relating and these elements are mentioned but underplayed in many of these studies.

Two convincing theoretical models are that of the person-environment fit (Roeser et

al., 2000) and of attachment to school (Smith, 2006). These models posit a model that accounts for relationships and does not reduce the complexity. Roeser et al. (ibid) argue that we could do much better at working with developmental processes, such as the search for and development of identity in early adolescents the need for emotional safety and the need to affiliate and belong in schools (Juvonen, 2007; Goodenow, 1993).

What is striking, however, is the lack of attention to these findings by policy makers. The research we have reviewed suggests a very human discourse and conception of education, with the notion of a supportive school being a very important one for those concerned with young people's emotional, social and cognitive development. Is it because it challenges the technical discourse of much recent policy directives and it is not easily simplified? The lack of development in practice on the relational is stark. An emphasis on relational matters is in contrast to a discourse of managing behaviour and a rather singular focus on the 'academic', which views it as separate from the emotional and social. The power of the concept of connectedness to school (or the very similar concepts of attachment and engagement) is one that has impressed us. If we are to be concerned with young people's emotional well-being, as well as their social and cognitive development, then attention to the processes by which young people engage and disengage is important.

The role of relationships with teachers and pupils is central to engagement. Bowlby (1969) argued that an attachment figure was an essential component to mental well-being, 'human beings of all ages are happiest and able to deploy their talents to best advantage when they are confident that, standing behind them, there are one or more trusted persons who will come to their aid should difficulties arise' (Bowlby, 1979, p.103). The sense of belonging that can arise from an emotional connection to individuals within the school, including peers and teachers, is fundamental to the sense of connectedness. Eccles and colleagues (1997), for example, have long argued for attention to the fit between the school environment and adolescents' development.

In contrast to the lack of pedagogical development around teacher-pupil relationships, many schools have taken very seriously the importance and capacity of peer relationships to provide emotional support and to improve well-being. There are many initiatives such as peer counselling, circles of friends and peer mentoring that aim to harness the learning and social capacity of peers. We are arguing, however, that while schools recognise the importance of peer relationships, it is the area of teacher-pupil relationships that have been neglected, and which could benefit pupils' well-being considerably

Johnson (2008) argues for the importance of the ordinary or the everyday in shaping young people's capacity to be resilient and face risk. Our review of the literature suggests that the centrality of teacher-pupil relationships in the everyday experience of schooling is being underdeveloped and the lack of research on the development of practice is noteworthy. It is may be because it is seemingly more powerful to devise a programme of activities but the everyday and pervasive power of relationships to affect learning, social development and mental health would suggest this is not the best way forward. There is a need to develop the responsibility for the role that schools play in the psychosocial development of young people. Reforming the curriculum is not going to be sufficient. Relationships matter a great deal.

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This paper arises from a systematic review of research being undertaken for the Changing Adolescence Programme (previously known as the Adolescent Mental Health Initiative). This is a specific programme of research on time trends in *adolescent mental health, set up by the Nuffield Foundation in 2005. The particular focus is the relationship between the school experiences of young people aged 10 to 14 and their mental health outcomes.*

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