SECTION THREE

TEACHER PREPARATION: GETTING THE BRIGHTEST AND MAKING THEM THE BEST
INTRODUCTION

It is only in the last few years that Australian universities have begun to recognise the value of mentoring relationships for learning organizations. Up until then there was a lack of recognition of the potential of mentoring. Matters (2002, p. 1) who views mentoring as the cornerstone of teaching and learning excellence, recognised that “enhanced learning outcomes derived from mentoring experiences and demonstrated by mentors and mentees in workplace teams in a multiplicity of organizations have been ignored.” Mentoring programs designed to improve university student retention rates are now being put in place, while other programs aim to assist individual staff (both academic and general) to achieve their potential.

The context of this chapter is one mentoring program that was designed to assist first year students with their transition to tertiary studies. When the university-wide program was first introduced, the Faculty of Education decided to trial the mentoring program with all the Bachelor of Teaching (Secondary) Science students, a selected number of students enrolled in the Bachelor of Physical Education, and 25% of the students enrolled in the Bachelor of Education (Primary) degree. To get the mentoring program up and running with the B. Ed Primary students, first there was the selection process, whereby 54 students were randomly selected and sent letters inviting them to participate in the program. Second, those students who agreed to participate were placed into mentoring groups of approximately six students. Third, each group of mentees met with an academic staff member who had volunteered to be the mentor for the group over a six-week period.

This chapter focuses on the experiences of one group of B. Ed Primary mentees, as well as the role their mentor adopted. The process of group interaction in the mentoring program is described from the perspective of the mentees who gave written feedback by email. From the mentees’ perspective, these social interactions succeeded in assisting them to feel confident enough to continue with their studies in the preservice teacher education course. One mentee wrote:

*I think it would be awesome for everyone to be involved in a mentoring group. A lot of the time I don’t think we needed ‘guidance’ but it was just great social interaction with people you would otherwise not have met*”

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Participation in the mentoring program helped the mentees develop their identity as university students. Each mentee’s identity evolved in every new encounter with