Peer mentoring in higher education: Mentees' perceptions and experiences

Jaye Barclay

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Peer Mentoring in Higher Education: Mentees’ Perceptions and Experiences

Jaye Barclay

A report submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of Bachelor of Science (Psychology) Honours, Faculty of Computing, Health and Science,

Edith Cowan University

Submitted 8/11/10.

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Due to Federal Government policy reforms in the 1990's, equity and access to higher education (McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001), has resulted in a major shift from elite to mass education (McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001). Increased participation in higher education has subsequently led to increased attrition rates, especially among first year, first semester undergraduate students (Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005). Over the past 15 years, the introduction of peer mentoring programs in Australian universities, have been recognised as an important step in addressing transitional issues (McLean, 2004), improving academic performance (Jacobi, 1991), and decreasing attrition rates (Drew, Pike, Pooley, Young, & Breen, 2001). This present study utilised a qualitative research design to explore undergraduate university students’ perceptions and experiences as mentees’ within a formal peer mentoring program, at a university in Western Australia. The sample size consisted of 14 participants, 10 females and 4 males who ranged in age from 18-45 years, (M=26yrs). Participants took part in one to one, in-depth interviews which were conducted utilising semi-structured open ended interview questions. Thematic content data analysis results identified three main themes, which included academic support, psychosocial support, and perceived peer mentoring support. The overall findings from this qualitative research study, has shown that the academic and psychosocial support provided by the peer mentoring program, helped students’ make a positive transition into tertiary studies. Furthermore, the knowledge and skills provided by the peer mentors may have helped to a certain extent, in the academic success students’ achieved in assignment writing skills. In addition limitations and future directions of this study were further discussed.
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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the psychology students who set aside their time to meet with me and share their perceptions and experiences as mentees within the peer mentoring program. Your thoughts and feelings have provided me with the extremely rich research data findings.

I would also like to extend my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Bronwyn Harman, who has always been supportive and available, to provide guidance and positive constructive feedback.

I would also like to thank Carole Gamsby, the fourth year student support officer, who has always been available and supportive.

Last but not least, sincere thanks to all my friends and family, who were always there when I needed them.
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Peer Mentoring in Higher Education: Mentees' Perceptions and Experiences.

Over the past two decades, the face of Australian universities has changed dramatically (Darlaston-Jones, Cohen, Haunold et al., 2003; Kantanis, 2000). Due to Federal Government policy reforms, equity and access to higher education (McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001) has resulted in a major shift from elite to mass education (Darlaston-Jones, Pike, Cohen et al., 2003; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001). Wider access and increased participation at a tertiary level has yielded greater diversity among student populations (McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001), in regards to demographic characteristics, (age, sex, socio-economic status, culture) (Kinnear, Sparrow, Boyce, & Middleton, 2008; Krause, Hartley, & Jones, 2005), and academic backgrounds and abilities (McInnis, 2001). Increased participation in higher education has subsequently led to increased attrition rates, especially among first year, first semester undergraduate students (Grob, 2000; Krause et al., 2005; McInnis, Hartley, et al., 2000). Because attrition is costly for both students and universities alike (Grob, 2000; Pitkethly & Prosser, 2001), the challenge for Australian universities has been to identify and understand the transitional issues that impact on heterogeneous student populations (Kantanis, 2000; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001) at first year first semester level, (Krause et al., 2005) and implement student support services that will effectively increase student retention rates (Johnston, 2001; McInnis, 2001).

One student support service identified in the literature includes peer mentoring programs (PMP). Peer mentoring programs in Australian universities, have been recognised as an important step in addressing transitional issues, (Jacobi, 1991; McInnis, James, & McNaught, 1995; McLean, 2004) improving academic performance (Jacobi, 1991) and decreasing attrition rates (Drew, Pike, Pooley, Young, & Breen, 2001). The following sections will highlight some of the transitional issues that impact
on school leavers, and mature age students and discuss the effectiveness of PMP’s at a tertiary, undergraduate level.

The First Year Experience: The Transition into Tertiary Studies

For new students commencing tertiary studies, the importance of a smooth, positive transition into the university environment, is well documented (Chang, Cohen, Pike, Pooley, & Breen, 2003; Darlaston-Jones, Pike, & Cohen et al., 2003; McInnis et al., 1995; Taylor & Mander, 2007; Tinto, 1975). According to Tinto’s (1975) Student Integration Model, how students interpret and deal with early experiences in the first few weeks of their first year at university, is highly predictive of their persistence in higher education. For school leavers and mature age students, the transition into higher education represents varying degrees of personal, social and academic adjustments (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Lawrence, 2005; Pitkethly & Prosser, 2001; Taylor, 2007). Often students are trying to find a balance between the academic and social demands of university life (Chang et al., 2003; Crisp, Nettlebeck, Sarris, et al., 2009) while maintaining their own personal commitments to friends /family, and full or part time employment (Crisp et al., 2009). While some students come to terms with the varied challenges of the university environment, other students find the transition into tertiary studies, both daunting and stressful (Long, Ferrier, & Heagney, 2006; McInnis et al., 1995; McInnis et al., 2000; Krause et al., 2005). For school leavers and mature age students alike, the stress and anxiety associated with the transition into university life,(Drew et al., 2001) can lead to feelings of disconnectedness and isolation (Grob, 2000; Peel, 2000; Tinto, 1975). Difficulties during the initial adjustment period, (Grob, 2000; Peat, & Hewitt, 1998) can impact negatively on students approach to learning and academic progress in general (Chang et al., 2003; McInnis et al., 1995), and may lead to academic failure, dropping out completely or underachievement in later semesters, (McInnis et al., 1995).
Factors Affecting Student Retention/Attrition Rates.

Factors affecting retention/attrition rates in Australian universities are both complex and diverse (Peel, 1999; Pitkethly & Prosser, 2001; Watson, Johnson, & Austin, 2004), incorporating a range of variables such as student demographic factors (Krause et al., 2005), psychological attributes, motivational status (Brinkworth, McCann, Mathew, & Nordstrom, 2006; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001; Watson et al., 2004; Urquhart & Pooley, 2007), financial status (Krause et al., 2003), student external commitments (Taylor & Mander, 2007), institutional demands (Brinkworth et al., 2006; McInnis, James et al., 2000), students' level of preparedness for tertiary studies (Pitkethly & Prosser, 2001), knowledge of course enrolled in and academic standing (McInnis, James et al., 2000). With the advent of mass higher education and increased attrition rates in the early 1990's, there has been a growing awareness that the first year experience, may in many ways predetermine students' overall approach to learning at a tertiary level (McInnis et al., 1995). Four nationwide surveys, spanning a 15 year period, from 1994 – 2009, were commissioned by the Australian Federal Government, to identify, examine and monitor the early experiences of undergraduate students in more depth (James, Krause, & Jennings, 2010; Krause et al., 2005; McInnis, James et al., 2000; McInnis et al., 1995). One major finding from these surveys identified that students unrealistic expectations of university life impacted on students' overall decision to stay and persist in academic studies (James et al., 2010; Taylor & Mander, 2007).

Students Expectations and Experiences of University Life.

Results from the four Australian wide surveys, found that the percentage of students maintaining unrealistic expectations of university life, remained consistent over a 15 year period, 18% in the 1994 survey (McInnis et al., 1995), compared with 17% in the 2009 survey (James et al., 2010). Specifically, students underestimated the overall
demands of standards and assessments expected of them, at a tertiary level (McInnis et al., 1995; McInnis, James et al., 2000). These findings are consistent with other Australian research studies (e.g., Brinkworth et al., 2009; Kantanis, 2000; Peel, 2000; Urquhart & Pooley, 2007) that suggests, that unrealistic expectations of the standard of work required and the amount of work required, in regards to adjusting to tertiary course structure, complexity of academic units (Johnston, 2001; Kantanis, 2000), study load demands (Taylor & Mander, 2007), accommodating to new teaching styles (Johnson, 2001), and mode of learning (Pitkethly & Prosser, 2001), undoubtedly places undue pressure on students, and has been identified as a major contributing factor in attrition rates (McInnis, Hartley et al., 2000).

The realities that face new students, are that within a very short period of time, they need to become adept as self directed learners (Kantanis, 2000; McInnis et al., 2000), with specific quintessential skills, that will ensure their successful transition into university life. These skills include, becoming familiar with campus resources and the layout of large university grounds (Grob, 2000) university rules; enrolments, appeals, extensions, deferrals, withdrawals, cultural practices /behaviours; correct ways of addressing/communicating with lecturers and tutors, adherence to consultation times, (Kantanis, 2000; Lawrence, 2005), teaching styles; formal/informal, lectures/tutorials/clinical practicum’s, (Kantanis, 2000; Lawrence, 2005), class participation; active, passive, group work (Lawrence, 2005), time management skills; readings, assignment, exam preparation, ways of thinking; inductive, deductive, surface, deep, analytical, critical, reflective, ways of writing; analytical, critical, reflective, essay, literature review, research report (Kantanis, 2000; Lawrence, 2005), research methodology; quantitative, qualitative (Lawrence, 2005), theoretical assumptions; positive, interpretist, jargon; scientific/psychological/technical, formatting
(Lawrence, 2005), reading requirements; texts, books, periodicals, online blackboard, power point, internet, referencing; in text/end text (Lawrence, 2005), computer competencies, multiple data base searches (Darlaston et al., 2001; Heirdsfield et al., 2005; Lawrence, 2005; Pitkethly & Prosser, 2001), assessments; assignments, exams, oral/written/clinical practicum’s, assessment weighting, (Kantanis, 2000; Lawrence, 2005).

For school leavers and mature age students, the prospect of entering tertiary studies for the first time, may appeal on many fronts, namely the prospect of being more autonomous in their approach to learning, looking forward to a more advanced academic learning environment and an expanded social environment (Johnston, 2001). The first few weeks at university can be likened to an exciting, yet daunting rollercoaster ride (Grob, 2000). From the first day, until the end of semester, students are bombarded with important information (Grob, 2000), such as reading requirements, assignment due dates and assessment weighting (Kantanis, 2000). Apart from the large amount of reading required on a week to week basis (Urquhart & Pooley, 2007), students are often overwhelmed with the sheer volume of reading requirements involved in assignment preparation, (Kantanis, 2000). By week 8 or 9, when two or more assignments are due at the same time (Grob, 2000; Kantanis, 2000), students can often experience a period of anxiety, shock and disbelief, when the full extent of tertiary course demands are realised (Grob, 2000). The stress and anxiety associated with the transition into university life (Drew et al., 2001), can lead to feelings of disconnectedness and isolation (Grob, 2000; Peel, 2000; Tinto, 1975).

At this stage students often try to play ‘catch up’, for time lost, by missing lectures and tutorials (Grob, 2000). Many students are also juggling other competing commitments, such as family and full or part time work (Crisp et al., 2009; Krause et al., 2005). Another added dilemma is the loneliness associated with social isolation.
Student’s often do not have the time, or find it difficult making friends with other students, (Kantanis, 2000; Urquhart & Pooley, 2009). By week 8 or 9, feeling overwhelmed and under prepared, some students may defer, withdraw, or simply drop out completely (Grob, 2000). In order to manage the challenges of tertiary studies, students need to quickly adjust to academic demands and establish social connections (Brinkworth et al., 2009; Kantanis, 2000).

**Institutional Commitments.**

Over the past 15 years, as a result of Australian research findings, Australian universities have recognised the need to address transitional issues, at a first year, first semester level (Krause et al., 2005, James et al., 2010). As part of an ongoing institutional commitment, many Australian universities have introduced transitional programs and student support services, (Krause et al., 2005). One student transitional program identified in the literature includes peer mentoring programs (Jacobi, 1991; McLean, 2004). Evaluation of specific peer mentoring programs, suggest that students involved in such programs demonstrate positive adjustment during the initial transitional period and higher retention rates (Drew et al., 2001).

**Peer Mentoring Programs at an Undergraduate Level**

Mentoring relationships have been applied in many professional settings such as, business management and organisational settings (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; Kram, 1988), psychology (Jacobi, 1991), law (Campell, & Campbell, 1997), at a graduate level, in educational settings and more recently at an undergraduate university level (James et al., 2010). Today in Australia it is widely accepted that peer mentoring at an undergraduate level can serve as a strategic support system for first year, first semester students. Research findings suggest, that PMP’s in Australian universities, whereby more experienced second and third year university students provide support and guidance for first year students (Terrion & Philion, 2008), and has been recognised
as an important step in addressing transitional issues (Jacobi, 1991; McInnis, James, & McNaught, 1995; McLean, 2004), improving academic performance (Jacobi, 1991) and decreasing student attrition rates (Drew et al., 2000; Terrion & Leonard, 2007; Watson, Johnson, & Austin, 2004).

Peer Mentoring Defined.

Mentoring is utilised in multiple professional settings (Topping, McCowan, & McCrae, 1998), therefore different meanings are applicable to different settings (Glass, & Walters, 2000; Jacobi, 1991). Although one single operational definition has not been identified (Harris, 2003), common themes related to three broad mentoring functions are consistently cited in the literature, (Harris, 2003). These include vocational/academic support, psychosocial support and role modelling (Jacobi, 1991; Kram, 1988). In the context of peer mentoring, at an undergraduate level, the peer mentor is viewed as a more experienced second or third year undergraduate student who acts as a role model and provides academic and psychosocial support and guidance for less experienced first year students (Jacobi, 1991). This definition can be closely linked with two theoretical models that underpin peer mentoring processes.

Peer Mentoring Models.

- Although the majority of research findings on PMP’s are not based on theoretical perspectives (Trembley & Rodger, 2003), two explanations that may contribute to the success of mentoring programs, may in part be attributed to Bandura’s (1986), Social learning theory (SLT) and Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory. Bandura’s (1986) SLT posits that most learning takes place through modelling. By observing the behaviours of others, one is able to directly regulate one’s own behavioural patterns, based on the effects and consequences of the observed model’s behaviour. Furthermore, modelling is deemed to be more effective, if the individual perceives the model to be similar to the self (Bandura, 1997). Within Vygotsky’s (1978)
sociocultural theory, the zone of proximal development explains that learning takes place through social interaction. Within the social context, individuals learn more complex tasks, under the guidance of more experienced peers. When applied to peer mentoring at an undergraduate level, less experienced students, learn vicariously within the social context of a group setting, when more experienced student peers model positive academic and social behaviours (Fox & Stevenson, 2006).

**Peer Mentoring Outcomes.**

The aim of PMP’s are to promote self regulatory learning (Harris, 2003; Heirdsfield et al., 2005), which is achieved through the implementation of a peer mentoring social support system, which reduces the likelihood of potential stress, uncertainty and feelings of isolation (Urquhart & Pooley, 2007), associated with the transition into tertiary studies. While most educational research literature is concerned with defining peer mentoring (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Hill & Reddy, 2007; Topping et al., 1998), describing the characteristics or role of peer mentors (Cramer & Prentice-Dunn, 2007: Cronan-Hill, Gensheimer, Cronan-Hillix, & Davidson, 1986; Terrion & Leonard, 2007), or analysing mentoring processes (Chan, 2008: Hill & Reddy, 2007, Terrion & Leonard, 2007; Pitney & Ehlerst, 2004), few research studies have focused on peer mentoring outcomes (Topping et al., 1998). Furthermore most research in this area is quantitative and lacks a qualitative approach (Jacobi, 1991).

Initially PMP’s were introduced to address attrition/retention rates among first year undergraduate students, (McInnis et al., 1995; McInnis et al., 2000), however research in this area has been fraught with methodological problems and causal links between PMP’s and decreased attrition/increased retention rates have been difficult to demonstrate (Topping, McCowan, & McCrae, 1998). Treston’s (1999), evaluation of PMP in a Queensland university, suggested that over an eight year period, there was a significant reduction in attrition rates among first year students, however data analysis
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and/or student percentage rates were not cited, therefore it is unclear how these results were obtained and to what extent the decrease in student dropout rates were directly related to peer mentoring (Hill & Reddy, 2007). Additional research studies supporting a link between PMP's and decreased attrition rates include evaluation of two PMP's in two Western Australian universities. Using a direct comparison approach, Stanley (2008), evaluation of a PMP, reported that the retention rates of first year students in 2007, were 91.4% compared with 81.0% in 2006.

Utilising similar methods, research finding by Drew et al. (2000), found that after the introduction of a PMP, the attrition rates dropped from 20% in 1998 to 8.7% in 2001. Although these results collectively appear promising, decline in attrition rates cannot be directly attributed to PMP's alone. As stated, factors affecting retention/attrition rates in Australian universities are both complex and diverse (Peel, 1999; Pitkethly & Prosser, 2001; Watson, Johnson, & Austin, 2004), and incorporate a range of variables (Krause et al., 2003). Furthermore, PMP's are also linked with improved academic abilities, however causality cannot be assumed (Topping et al., 1998).

Additional research problems identified in the educational research literature, relate to the specificity of PMP's. Due to the diversity of PMP's in relation to structure, aims and goals, attempts to generalise research findings has become problematic (Jacobi, 1991; Topping et al., 1998; Trembley & Rodgers, 2003). For example, PMP's may be structured as formal or informal (Jacobi, 1991), mentors may consist of faculty staff members (Mee-Lee & Bush, 2003; Storrs, Putshe, & Taylor, 2008), graduate students (Chan, 2008; Pitney & Ehlerst, 2004), or undergraduate second or third year students (Fox & Stevenson, 2006; Glasser, Hall, & Halperin, 2006; Heirdsfield et al., 2005), mentors may be specially trained (Breen et al., 2001), or left unsupervised, (Jacobi, 1991), consist of mentor/
mentee dyads (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Hill & Reddy, 2007), or involve group mentoring sessions (Jacobi, 1991), recruitment of mentors may be voluntary (Breen et al., 2001), or part of unit assessment requirements (Heirdsfield et al., 2005), likewise mentee initiation may be compulsory or voluntary (Jacobi, 1991). Therefore generalisability of previous research findings is difficult to ascertain (Topping et al., 1998).

**Positive Outcomes.**

Although PMP’s have not been directly linked to improved academic performance or decreased attrition rates (Krause et al., 2003), research studies evaluating PMP’s suggest that these programs provide a number of academic and psychosocial benefits, for first year undergraduate students (Glass & Walter, 2000; Glasser et al., 2006, Heirdsfield et al., 2005). For example, a qualitative research study undertaken by Hill and Reddy (2007), evaluating a peer mentoring pilot scheme at a university in the United Kingdom, found that the overall support provided by the mentors, was a major theme to emerge. Mentees perceived their more experienced student mentors as being more approachable, than faculty members. Another theme identified within this study was the academic support provided by the mentors in regards to assignment writing and exam advice. These findings are also consistent with a study conducted by Stanley and Lapsley (2008), in which a PMP evaluation questionnaire, with a response rate of 46.4% identified five themes, directly related to the role and support of the student mentor. Mentees reported that they valued the input of more experienced student mentors, because they had greater insight into new students’ transitional problems and were perceived as more approachable than lecturers or tutors. The support provided by peer mentors, in turn helped to decrease stress and create a sense of belonging to the group (Stanley & Lapsley, 2008). Other related studies specifically analysing the effects of social support, at an undergraduate level,
have suggested that student's academic and social adjustment, to a large extent is related to the social support that student's received (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Urquhart & Pooley, 2007).

Positive peer mentoring support has also been associated with purposive matching (Kochan, 2002). For example, in an evaluation of a PMP at a university in Western Australia, Drew et al. (2001), found that pairing mentors with mentees in accordance with socio-demographic characteristics, improved the likelihood of positive outcomes for mentees (Chang et al., 2001). Similar results by Heirdsfield, et al. (2005) showed that mentees within a peer mentoring group, who were matched in age, gender and parental status, reported that these similarities provided a common ground in which to build friendships with other students.

Other academic and psychosocial benefits to emerge in the research literature include; academic knowledge and skill acquisition in the form of library tours and computer assistance (Breen et al., 2001; Drew et al., 2001) assignment writing, referencing skills and exam preparation (Hill & Reddy, 2007; Heirdsfield, Walker, & Walsh, 2005), the development of social networking skills, (Breen et al., 2001; Heirdsfield et al., 2005), study groups (Breen et al., 2001; Chan, 2008) and the introduction of student support services (Drew et al., 2001). For example Fox and Stevenson's (2006), evaluation of a PMP, found that the acquired academic writing skills, knowledge of degree course requirements and affiliation with the peer mentoring group, provided the mentees with better academic coping skills, and self confidence within social situations. In support of these findings, Glass and Walters (2000), identified that a peer mentoring program in a university in New South Wales, provided a supportive environment in which students could share their thoughts and feelings, related to their transition into tertiary studies. This in turn, strengthened their sense of belonging to the peer mentor and the peer mentoring group.
An additional study by Glasser et al. (2006), evaluation of several PMP's at a university in New South Wales, found that the results of a self report survey, with a response rate of 36%, identified that mentees benefited from such things as skill development, a better understanding of university course requirement, the social contacts that the PMP's provided and a sense of belonging to the university community. The limitation of these findings indicate that a survey, targeting 438 mentees, from 14 PMP's, with a 36% return rate is an extremely low response rate, and may not be representative of the total mentee population. Furthermore these findings may affect the generalisability of the results to the larger population.

**Challenging Outcomes.**

Although mentoring programs aim to support students, both academically and psychosocially, mentoring programs are not without their problems. Difficulties that can arise include; mentor/mentee personality mismatch (Ehrich et al., 2004; Mee-Lee & Bush, 2003), poor communication skills (Glass & Walter, 2000; Glasser et al., 2006; Stanley & Lapsley, 2008), time table clashes and/or the unavailability of mentors (Chan, 2008; Glasser et al., 2006, Heirdsfield et al., 2005). Difficulties can also arise when there is a discrepancy between student’s expectations and actual realities of mentoring program relationships (Storrs, Putsche, & Taylor, 2009). Peer mentoring problems such as these can leave students feeling alone and unsupported (Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004).

**Research Design and Measurement Issues**

Research studies evaluating PMP’s at an undergraduate level, have shown that the academic and psychosocial support offered, can help students make a positive transition into tertiary studies. However causal links between PMP’s, retention rates and improved academic ability, has been difficult to demonstrate (Topping et al., 1998). Methodological problems include the inability to control for confounding variables, and
lack of external validity. Although social learning theory (Bandura, 1986) and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), may help to explain the success of PMP’s, clearly the methodological problems associated with PMP’s at an undergraduate level, are weakened by a lack of operational definitions and theoretical constructs (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Trembley). Furthermore, most research in this area is quantitative and has focussed on mentoring roles (Terrion & Leonard, 2007), or mentoring processes (Hill & Reddy, 2007), instead of outcome evaluations (Topping et al., 1998).

**Research Questions:**

This present study aimed to explore first year university students’ perceptions and experiences as mentees within a formal peer mentoring program. The specific research questions were:

1. What are the initial expectations of mentees towards a formal peer mentoring program?
2. What are the experiences of mentees towards a formal peer mentoring program?

**Methodology**

**Research Design**

This present study utilised a qualitative research design, to explore undergraduate university students’ perceptions and experiences of a formal peer mentoring program, at a university in Western Australia. Qualitative data analysis, utilising in depth interviewing techniques has the capacity to capture the essence of personal experiences, (Patton, 2002).

**Paradigm and Assumptions**

A social constructivist framework, incorporating phenomenological methodology, was chosen in order to understand individual undergraduate students lived perceptions and experiences of the phenomenon of being a mentee within a peer mentoring program (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 20087). Social constructivism recognises
that knowledge is socially construed (Patton, 2002) and acknowledges that multiple realities exist, (Cresswell, 2007). How we interpret reality and construct meaning in our lives is dependent on individual thoughts, feelings and perceptions, therefore reality is subjective (Cresswell, 2007). The central aim of this approach was to therefore capture the quintessential personal experiences of this phenomenon, (Patton, 2002).

In relation to the role of the researcher, it is acknowledged that qualitative research is also subjective. Therefore it is becoming progressively more conventional to explain the rationale for undertaking specific research studies, (Crotty, 1998; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). In my second and third year as a psychology student at a university in Western Australia, I was actively involved in the Peer Mentoring Program, as a mentor. I therefore acknowledge that I have both a personal and professional interest in the topic being researched. In light of this, I recognise that my experiences may also subjectively impact on the way the research is undertaken.

Participants

A sample of 14 participants, consisting of 10 females and 4 males were recruited from the student population, in the School of Psychology, at a university in Western Australia. Participants ranged in age from 18-45 years, ($M=26$yrs). A criterion sampling technique was utilised. Inclusion criteria included that; (1) each participant was a psychology student, (2) each participant had commenced university studies in 2009, and (3) each participant was a mentee in the Peer Mentoring Program, in the School of Psychology in either first or second semester, 2009. At the time of the research, (2010), the participants were either in their first year, second semester, or second year of their studies. As a retrospective study, this enabled student’s to reflect on their experiences as mentees, within the peer mentoring program.
Data Collection Procedures

A mass email was sent out to this specific cohort of undergraduate psychology students, with an attached flyer explaining the research and providing contact details of the researcher (see Appendix D). In conjunction, flyers explaining this research were displayed in various key areas in the School of Psychology, and around the university campus (see Appendix D). Also, with the permission from two psychology lecturers, handouts (see Appendix E), were given out to undergraduate psychology students, in two specific psychology lectures. As a further incentive, a $10.00 cafe voucher was offered to all potential participants. A total of 17 prospective participants expressed their interest in the project and the first 14 participants, who met the inclusion criteria, were accepted for interview.

In order to explore university student’s perceptions and experiences of the peer mentoring program, one to one in-depth interviews were conducted utilising semi-structured open ended interview questions. This style and formatting of data collection aimed to provide a relaxed and private atmosphere (Liamputtomg & Ezzy, 2008) in which participants could openly share their individual thoughts and feelings (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1995). The interview schedule (see Appendix C) consisted of 7 questions. All interview schedule questions were developed from specific research studies addressing peer mentoring in higher education, and included questions such as, What were your initial expectations of the PMP? Did your experiences of the PMP differ from your initial expectations? Did the PMP aid in your transition into university? (See Appendix C). Data collection was further facilitated by the use of probes.

Prior to commencement of the one to one interviews, an information letter outlining the aim of the research (see Appendix A), and an informed consent form (see Appendix B), were given to each potential participant. The one to one in-depth
interviews were conducted in a conference room at the School of Psychology. Each interview was audio taped with participant consent. The interviews lasted approximately 20-30 minutes, and continued until saturation was reached at 14 participants. On completion of each interview all participants were debriefed.

**Data Analysis**

Prior to conducting this research study, a pilot interview was conducted to test for readability and face validity of the interview schedule and to refine the interview questions. (Minichiello et al., 1995). Data from the one to one in-depth interviews were transcribed verbatim. This ensured that the analysis of all the data collected remained authentic and accurate (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A thematic content analysis was then conducted, to identify central patterns and themes (Patton, 2002). This was achieved by data immersion, multiple readings of each transcript, highlighting and coding words and concepts, most frequently used in the text, and grouping these concepts together to identify sub-themes and dominant themes (Green, Willis, Hughes, Small, Welch, & Gibbs et al., 2007: Miles & Huberman, 1998). A reflective journal (see Appendix F), was kept, that contained the researcher’s thoughts, feelings, and reactions related to the interview process, data collection and analysis. Reflective journalism ensured that any biases were noted by the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To further prevent researcher bias, and maintain authenticity, analysis of the data, the checking of sub themes and main themes were verified by the researcher’s supervisor. This further added to the credibility and rigour of the findings (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2008).

**Ethics**

Prior to the commencement of this research, approval to undertake this study was granted by the Faculty of Computing and Health Science Research Ethics Committee, at a university in Western Australia. The participation letter (see Appendix
A) that outlines the aim of this present study, and the informed consent form (see Appendix B), was explained and given to each potential participant prior to commencement of the research. Participant confidentiality was ensured by omitting names from all typed transcripts, and replaced with pseudonyms. Once transcribed, all digital voice recordings of the interviews identifying research participants were erased. Transcribed data was then downloaded on to a disc, the research data was then stored in a locked cabinet in the School of Psychology and Social Sciences at university for a period of 5 years. After the 5 year holding period, any sensitive computer data will be destroyed using professional erasure techniques and by destruction of physical media.

**Findings and Interpretations**

The present paper aimed to qualitatively explore undergraduate psychology student's perceptions and experiences of a formal peer mentoring program, at a university in Western Australia. The three main themes that emerged from within this study included; academic support, psychosocial support, and perceived peer mentoring support, support being the overarching theme. The 3 main themes, subthemes and associated concepts are presented in Table 1.

**Academic Support**

The first main theme to emerge from this study was academic support. The PMP provided mentees with general information and academic knowledge and skills. Examples of how academic support aided in students' adjustment to tertiary studies are as follows:

Michelle:

"There were things like......how to write an essay, how to hand in an assignment, how to get a cover sheet.....how to use the website properly.....study tips and exam preparation, all those things, you could speak to the peer mentor."
Table 1

Themes and Sub-themes: Mentees Perceptions and Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Themes</th>
<th>Sub-Themes</th>
<th>Concepts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support (Overarching Theme)</td>
<td>Academic Support</td>
<td>Knowledge/Skill</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Positive Academic Outcomes</td>
<td>Acquisition:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Intrinsic Rewards</td>
<td>Campus Resources</td>
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<td>Support Services</td>
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<td>Time Management Skills</td>
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<td>Assignment Writing</td>
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<td>Study Tips</td>
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<td>Exam Preparation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Uncertainty Reduction</td>
<td>Course Curriculum</td>
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<td>Information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychosocial Support</td>
<td>Developing Friendships</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Feelings of Isolation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lack of Self Confidence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sense of Belonging To Group</td>
<td>Purposive Matching:</td>
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<td>Shared Experiences</td>
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<td>Normalising Experiences</td>
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<td>Perceived Peer Mentoring Support</td>
<td>Peer Mentoring Role</td>
<td>Role Modelling:</td>
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<td>Experiential Knowledge</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dependability</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peer Mentoring Program</td>
<td>Structure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cas also commented:

“*She (mentor) helped me in a general sense, about general things.....where things are....the layout (campus)....and assignments.....it's a big campus, walk around just to find out where I am meant to go*”
Jack also reported:

"...& he (mentor), asked us to give him our assignments & he'd look at it & tell us ways to improve on it, or tell us what tutors like to see, yeah he was really helpful.

Heather:

"Yes she (Mentor), did answer our questions, she was very helpful when it came to looking for articles & how to use metaquest & all that, cos she was very good at explaining & she offered to like, explain metaquest as a group, or do it one to one

The mentees identified that their peer mentors were helpful in disseminating academic knowledge and skills, such as assignment writing skills, computer skills, website skills, data base searches, study tips and exam preparation skills. Heather also noted that her mentor was sensitive to the individual wants and needs of new students' by offering to explain Metaquest (data base searching), as a group, or on a one to one basis.

Positive academic outcomes were also identified as an important factor in academic adjustment. For example Jack commented:

It helped me more academically than socially, I had a group of friends....the high achievement that I got because of my mentor's help, with 89% that was very rewarding.

Vicki also stated:

I did really well in all my assignments in the first semester...um and that made me feel good about myself; like getting assignments back and thinking whoa 96%, or that 76%, that's really awesome....Yeah I'm just trying to state that it just, it was a very big help (PMP)"
Similar comments by Heather stated:

_Academically, yes it (PMP), did help (self confidence), because I got my assignments back and it was whoa......very good answers.....I got like 7 out of 8...I danced around the room it was pretty awesome....I loved it and now I am going to try hard in my second year”_

As can be seen, the PMP provided mentees with the academic knowledge and skill, which enabled the mentees to approach their academic studies, in a positive confident manner and therefore acquired positive academic outcomes. The peer mentoring program may also have had a positive effect on students’ intrinsic motivation. Peer mentoring programs aim to provide information and promote help seeking behaviors (Trembley & Rodger, 2003), therefore peer mentoring support may have a positive effect on students approach to academic studies (Hill & Reddy, 2007). The intrinsic rewards associated with academic success may, increase competence and mastery over new skills and further influence ones approach to study (Kalabenick & Knapp 1991).

Another transitional issue identified in this study, related to the personal, social and academic adjustments, that students face when entering tertiary studies as new students. As Vicki succinctly stated:

“First semester was worse...started to struggle with time management and that sort of thing...... Beginning to think shall I just stop (withdraw)....overwhelmed with uni cos it was a whole different environment. Mentor helped (me) balance workload uni ....and social life.

Vicki’s thoughts and feelings are reflected in the educational research literature. Often students are trying to find a balance between academic and social demands of university life (Chang et al., 2003; Crisp et al., 2009), while maintaining their own personal commitments to friends, family and full or part time employment
Mentees' Perceptions and Experiences 21

(Crisp, 2009). While some students come to terms with the varied challenges of the university environment, other students find the transition into tertiary studies, daunting and stressful (Krause et al., 2005; Long et al., 2006) and may lead to academic failure, dropping out completely, or underachievement in later semesters (McInnis et al., 1995).

Information related to specific course curriculums and future studies may also help reduce uncertainty and anxiety related to the degree course. As two mentees noted:

Hannah:

"It was helpful to get more information about how we are to go about assignments, what the exam is like, how to be prepared, what kind of questions, you know, the nature of things and what kind of work, how much work you are needed to do...what to expect...you are more relaxed about things when you know more, because you have been told more"

Daniel:

"So she (mentor) did explain what it is like in second and third year, so in that I was a little bit more relaxed in knowing that you know what is going to happen, and how much harder is the work going to get"

According to uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), when a person experiences uncertainty in new or novel situations, individuals are motivated to seek relevant information in order to reduce uncertainty (Heirdsfield et al., 2005). Information regarding undergraduate and post graduate course work provided insight into the degree and course requirements and therefore reduced uncertainty and anxiety (Fox & Stevenson, 2006). The above qualifying statements show that the information, provided by the peer mentors, such as location of campus resources, knowledge and skill acquisition with time management skills, computer data base skills, assignment writing skills, study tips preparation, and course curriculum information reduced the uncertainty and anxiety related to tertiary studies and provided students with the
academic support necessary for a positive transition into tertiary studies. Although PMP’s have not been directly linked to improved academic performance (Topping et al., 1998) the knowledge and skills provided by the peer mentors may have helped to a certain extent in the academic success students’ achieved in assignment writing skills.

**Psychosocial Support**

The second main theme to emerge in this study was psychosocial support (see Table 1). The research literature identified that the transition into tertiary studies can be both daunting and stressful (Long et al., 2006), and may lead to feelings of disconnectedness and social isolation (Grob, 2000). Furthermore, stress and anxiety may negatively impact on students’ approach to learning and academic progress, in general (Chang et al., 2003). Therefore the aim of PMP’s are to reduce stress and anxiety related to the transition by providing psychosocial support (Glass & Walter, 2000).

Jessie’s initial experience of university life was as follows:

(I)...um a bit confused I didn’t know anybody......and I felt so alone... and there were just little things I didn’t know about......I was getting good grades..so bits of advice were helpful, from an academic point of view, but um, it was more that knowing that someone was there that I could email cos I had no one.

For Jessie, making that contact with her peer mentor, just knowing that support was only an email, or a phone call away, made all the difference in her perception of university life.

Vicki also commented:

*She (mentor) had been through it (undergraduate degree) and she (mentor) was fine....getting on with it, so it was kind of a light at the end of the tunnel....and we were so alike....I could relate to her so much...... (PMP)......yeah it definitely did (help), it just got rid of the stress factor and it just made me realize that I can do this.*
Vicki has identified four points here. Firstly, Vicki has identified with her peer mentor, because she is a more experienced student and has faced similar transitional issues, as Vicki. The research in this area suggest, that more experienced, student mentors have a greater understanding of students’ transitional issues and are perceived as more approachable than lecturers or tutors (Stanley & Lapsley, 2008). Secondly, Vicki has also identified her peer mentor as a positive role model, not only did Vicki perceive her peer mentor as a survivor in her transition into tertiary studies, but also as a successful survivor. The three broad peer mentoring functions identified in the research literature include academic support, psychosocial support and peer role modeling (Harris, 2003; Jacobi, 1991). Positive peer role modeling, such as this, may be effective in promoting academic and social values at a tertiary level (Hill & Reddy, 2007). The fourth point that Vicki made, was that her relationship with her peer mentor had helped to reduce the stress associated with her transition into her tertiary studies. Stress reduction has been identified in the research literature as a major outcome of PMP’s. Stanley and Lapsley’s (2008), research findings showed that the support provided by the peer mentors helped to ameliorate the stress, often associated with students transition into university. Similar results were also found by Terrion and Leonard (2007).

Purposive matching, grouping mentors with mentees in accordance with socio-demographic characteristics was a strategy incorporated within this specific PMP, which lead to positive outcomes for the mentees such as, building friendships, decreasing stress and enhancing a sense of belonging to the peer mentor, and the peer mentoring group.

Comments by Josh, a young mentee were as follows:

"Socially, it was definitely much more helpful having people my age group...because we did it in a group setting. I actually made a couple of pretty good
friends......the group gave me some friends & stuff, so we could adapt to uni life together."

Clearly the advantages identified by Josh, included being able to converse with other students of a similar age, within a peer mentoring group setting. Although mentor/mentee dyad relationships can be successful (Storrs et al., 2008), research in this area have found that purposive matching in peer mentoring groups, may provide an opportunity in which to build friendships (Kochan, 2002). Both school leavers and mature age students, within the PMP benefited from purposive matching. Brooke, a mature age student talked about her initial transition into university life was as follows:

"I was quite overwhelmed.....terrified would be the word.....I'm normally quite confident......but I was out of my comfort zone........meeting with other women, (PMP) I realised I was not the only one .....we were all in the same boat...."

Julie, another mature age student shared her experiences:

" I was very worried that I was going to walk into my first lecture and be the oldest student there & felt very uncomfortable walking into my first lecture, but I was peered with a mentor, who was a mature age student & not only was that wonderful, but also the group was full of mature age students & that was very wonderful because up until then I hadn't really spoken to any other students.......making connections I realized that we were having the same experiences.....facing the same problems....all in the same boat.

Both Brooke and Julie have identified several feelings, such as a lack of self confidence, anxiety, stress, loneliness, feelings of not fitting in with a younger group of students and social isolation. Both these students were supported by their peer mentoring group, which included students of a similar age and circumstances. By sharing their experiences with other students in the peer mentoring group, both Julie and Brooke realised that most students in the group were experiencing similar thoughts and
feelings. Identification with other mentees in this way, allowed these students to validate and therefore normalize their experiences (Heirdsfield et al., 2005), and develop greater self confidence (Fox & Stevenson, 2006; Trenton, 1999). Consistent with other research findings, both these students developed close bonds with their peer mentor and the mentees within the group (Heirdsfield et al., 2005). The mentees within this PMP were able to connect with other students, build friendships, and enhance a sense of belonging to the group.

**Perceived Peer Mentoring Support**

The third main theme identified within this study, was perceived peer mentoring support (see Table 1). The mentees talked about their perceptions of the PMP in relation to their initial expectations and actual experiences of the program and identified the role of their peer mentor, in relation to the functions they provided. Two mentees shared their thoughts:

Jessie:

*I was expecting not to learn anything new...I expected it to be a bit boring...... (but) ......it was a bit of a surprise.... I really liked the PMP..... my... (mentor) was lovely she was very friendly and very helpful.*

Vicki:

*I wasn’t really expecting a great deal ...... When I actually met her (Mentor) found I related to her so much......*

Both these students had not heard of the PMP prior to commencing their university studies and found that their experiences far exceeded their expectations. Rob, on the other hand, did have preconceived ideas of the PMP.
Rob:

"My expectations... pretty much the same as my experiences really... it was going to be someone older, who would pretty much show us the ropes of uni life.... help us with assignments... & other general stuff...... cos they are also going through it themselves."

Rob identified his peer mentor as a more experienced student who has successfully navigated his/her transition into tertiary studies and possessed the attributes that Rob would expect from a student within that role. Rob was certainly not disappointed. Findings from a literature review by Terrion and Leonard, (2007) identified that the success of PMP’s were largely due to mentor characteristics such as commitment to the PMP, university experience, and academic achievement.

Another point of view was expressed by Brooke:

*I had no preconceived expectations, I was just pleased about the idea...I was just grateful for anything that I got, to be honest, yeah, because I really didn’t expect to get as much help as we actually got.*

Hannah also stated:

"It was helpful having someone you could find easily....you don’t know which questions to direct to which person but your peer mentor you could ask any question & they would know, or direct you......they would be like the map of the uni, cos they already know how it’s done"

Both these mentees identified the PMP as being very supportive. Hannah’s qualifying statement reflected Rob’s comments that the peer mentor was a more experienced and knowledgeable student. Hannah also identified her peer mentor as being accessible at all times, and able to communicate well.
Michelle:

*Initially I was quite surprised that there was a PMP (an ad on television)* pleasantly surprised but also a little apprehensive about anything to do with coming to university....but that is why I am here, I found it (PMP) very important for me it was a big factor in deciding to come to study full time here (University).

Michelle was motivated to enroll in the psychology course at this particular university because the school of psychology had advertised on television that they provided a peer mentoring program, for first year undergraduate psychology students. Michelle was very impressed with the caring supportive environment, the school of psychology provided.

Not all students utilised the PMP. Chad reported that:

*Great idea (PMP)...could only benefit people if they are struggling. ......I sort of geared up for uni, (university preparation course)... it was good just to have that thought in the back of your mind, that oh, I have got that support, I've got back up.....but I didn't overly use it (PMP) ...but I can see why it would help a lot of people...doubting themselves and don't know what to do it's a good resource to have in place...um just help people to adapt and feel more comfortable...I can relate to someone who has been in that situation,*

Another mentee who also participated in the university preparation course did not utilize the PMP to the full extent.

Shelley:

*"I am a mature age student, I did the university preparation course, (UPC), so the PMP did nothing for me......she (mentor), helped me with an assignment on one occasion....um but, not really a good mentor, not a leader, um very nervous, didn't really seem confident."*
Shelly’s mentor was younger than her and may have felt nervous around a mentee who was older, and had more experiential life skills. There is also the possibility that there was a mentor/mentee, personality mismatch (Ehrich et al., 2004). Although Shelly’s experiences of the PMP did not live up to her expectations, she also stated that she did not require the support that the PMP was providing.

Daniel also stated:

*I made friends quickly....I fail to see what difference the PMP could have made to me I was expecting it (PMP), to be a one on one, like in the ad.....thought s(he), would be like a counselor, or something.............she didn’t stipulate what her role was..... personally.....tutorials  they are very basic....I started thinking that the whole program was pretty much useless......I was expecting there to be more structure maybe I was expecting it..........she wasn’t entirely approachable....I felt she was doing it (peer mentoring) cos she had to, not because she wanted to....she wasn’t confident.*

Similar to Shelley and Chad’s statements, Daniel did not feel the need to utilise the support of the PMP. It is also noted that there was a mismatch between Daniel’s expectations and realities of the PMP, although PMP’s at an undergraduate level aim to provide academic and psychosocial support, their role does not usually include counseling, or tutoring (Terrion & Leonard, 2007). Daniel also identified, as did Shelley, that their peer mentors were not confident and lacked good communication skills. The research literature suggests that peer mentors’ interpersonal communication skills are a vital mentoring characteristic (Mee-Lee & Bush, 2003; Stanley & Lapsley, 2008), and that mentor selection should be on based on maturity, practical knowledge and experiential knowledge (Terrion & Leonard, 2008).

Daniel also observed that his peer mentor’s lack of enthusiasm and/or poor communication skills may be attributed to a certain reluctance to fulfill the role of a peer mentor. This specific PMP is formal and compulsory. All first year, first semester
students are automatically enrolled in the program as mentees, and third year psychology students fulfill the role of the mentor, as part of a third year unit course requirement. Although some students may be more suited in the role of peer mentoring (Terrion & Leonard, 2008), institutionalized peer mentoring programs, may provide students with the opportunity to develop peer mentoring skills (Mee-Lee & Bush, 2003).

Conclusion

The aim of this qualitative study was to explore first year university students’ perceptions and experiences as mentees within a formal peer mentoring program at a university in Western Australia.

The research questions were:

1. What are the expectations of mentees towards a formal peer mentoring program?

2. What are the experiences of mentees towards a formal peer mentoring program?

The overarching theme to emerge regarding students expectations of the PMP was the overall support that peer mentors provided. Primary themes identified in this study relating to mentees expectations and experiences included, academic support, psychosocial support, and perceived peer mentoring support.

The mentees identified that the academic support provided by the PMP reduced the uncertainty and anxiety related to tertiary studies and provided students with the academic support necessary for a positive transition into tertiary studies. Although PMP's have not been directly linked to improved academic performance (Topping et al, 1998), the knowledge and skills provided by the peer mentors may have helped to a certain extent in the academic success students’ achieved in assignment writing skills.
The second main theme to emerge in this study was psychosocial support. Most of the mentees within this study acknowledged that they perceived their transition into tertiary studies as stressful, and to a certain extent socially isolating. The psychosocial support provided by the PMP helped in reducing the stress and anxiety related to the transition. Purposive matching in peer mentoring groups, also provided a common ground in which to build friendships, helped in decreasing stress and enhancing a sense of belonging to the peer mentoring group.

The third main theme to emerge in this study was perceived peer mentoring support. Mentees perceptions of the PMP were described by the mentees, in relation to the role and the functions that the peer mentor provided. Mentees identified their peer mentors as more experienced students, who understood the transitional issues that faced new students. Furthermore mentees perceived that the PMP would be helpful in a general sense, as well as assisting mentees in adjusting to the academic and social university environment.

Although peer mentoring programs aim to support students, academically and psychosocially, PMP's are not without their problems. One challenging outcome identified by two mentees was the lack of confidence and poor communication skills that their mentors displayed. It was also suggested that this may be attributed to the compulsory nature of the peer mentoring program. Although some students may be more suited in the role of peer mentoring (Terrion & Leonard, 2008), institutionalised peer mentoring programs, may provide students with the opportunity to develop peer mentoring skills (Mee-Lee & Bush, 2003). The overall findings from this qualitative research study, has shown that the academic and psychosocial support provided by the peer mentoring program, helped students’ make a positive transition into tertiary studies. Furthermore, the knowledge and skills provided by the peer mentors may have
helped to a certain extent in the academic success students achieved in assignment writing skills.

The main limitation of this study was the under representation of male participants. This study included a sample of 14 participants, consisting of 10 females and 4 males, however presently in Australia, social sciences, and psychology courses, tend to attract a higher female to male ratio. Therefore this sample of participants may indeed reflect a representative sample for this study. In order to further understand the phenomena of peer mentoring programs at an undergraduate level, a more rigorous, in-depth approach in research methodology, such as a mixed method, qualitative, quantitative study, that explores the perceptions and experiences of both mentees and mentors, may provide greater insights into the dynamic and complex issues that face new students and the positive ongoing support provided by these peer mentoring programs. This thesis provided insight into a formal PMP, at a university in Western Australia as it is currently run and perhaps this thesis should be read in conjunction with a formal evaluation of the program, therefore it can add to the knowledge strengths and challenges of this formal PMP.
References


T. Pascarelli. (Eds), *Global Perspectives on Mentoring* (pp. 277-293).


Appendix A

Participation Information Letter

Dear Participant,

My name is Jaye Barclay and I am a fourth year Honours student in psychology at Edith Cowan University. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research project, conducted as part of my Honours degree. The project involves a one to one in-depth interview, whereby I will be asking psychology students to reflect on and share their perceptions and experiences as a mentee within the Peer Mentoring Program in 2009. The interview will be audiotaped and should take approximately 30-40 minutes. Please note that this research project has been approved by the Faculty of Computing and Health Science Research Ethics Committee at Edith Cowan University.

Please be assured that any information that you provide will be held in strict confidence by the student researcher. At no time will your name be reported along with your responses. All information will be reported anonymously, and at the conclusion of this study a report of the results will be available on request. Please understand that your participation is totally voluntary and that you are free to withdraw at any time during this study. In the unlikely event that you experience discomfort from participating in the research, telephone counselling (anonymous) can be received from Life Line 131 144 or The Samaritans (08) 9381 5555. If you have any questions about your participation in my research please contact either myself or my supervisor Dr Bronwyn Harman on the following numbers. If you would like to speak to someone who is independent of this study you may contact Dr Justine Dandy, who is the 4th year psychology co-ordinator.

Jaye Barclay  
Ph: [Redacted]  
Email: jebarcla@our.ecu.edu.au  

Dr Bronwyn Harman  
Ph: (08) 6304 5021  
Email: b.harman@ecu.edu.au

Dr Justine Dandy  
Ph: (08) 6304 5105  
Email: j.dandy@ecu.edu.au

Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

Jaye Barclay
Appendix B

Informed Consent Document

Peer Mentoring in Higher Education: Mentees’ Perceptions and Experiences

Contact Details:

Student Researcher  Jaye Barclay  Ph: [redacted]
Email: jebarcla@student.ecu.edu.au

Supervisor  Dr Bronwyn Harman
Ph: (08) 6304 5021
Email: b.harman@ecu.edu.au

- I have been provided with a copy of the information letter, explaining the research study.
- I understand the content of the information sheet provided.
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions, and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I am aware that if I have any additional questions I can contact the research team.
- I have been informed that the research project will involve participation in a one to one interview that will last approximately 40 minutes.
- I understand that the information I give will be kept confidential and my identity will not be disclosed.
- I am aware that the results of the research project may be published in reports, conference papers and journals but that confidentiality will be maintained at all times.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from further participation at any time without explanation or penalty.
- I freely agree to participate in the project.

Name ..............................................
Signature ..............................................
Date ....../...../.....

Researcher ..............................................
Signature ..............................................
Date ....../...../.....
Appendix C

Interview Schedule

1. In your first semester, when you heard about the Peer Mentoring Program, during orientation, what were your initial expectations of the program?

2. As a mentee, did your experiences of the Peer Mentoring Program differ from your initial expectations?

3. As a mentee, did being a part of the Peer Mentoring Program aid in your transition into university life, in your first year, first semester?

4. What were your most rewarding experiences as a mentee?

5. Did you encounter any difficulties as a mentee?

6. Now that you have been through the Peer Mentoring Program as a mentee, would you consider becoming a mentor?

7. Are there any aspects of the Peer Mentoring Program that you would change, or improve on?
If you are a psychology student and were a mentee in the Peer Mentoring Program in either 1st or 2nd semester 2009 and can spare 30-40 minutes of your time to participate in a qualitative research study, please contact me to arrange a time and place.

My name is Jaye Barclay. I am a psychology student at ECU and this research is for my Honours Thesis.

This research has ECU’s Faculty of Computing Health and Science Ethics Committee approval.

If you are interested in participating in this study please contact me on: jebarcla@our.ecu.edu.au Alternatively PH: [redacted]

$10 voucher for Aroma Cafe for each participant chosen for this study
Appendix E

Exploring Mentees' Perceptions and Experiences of the Peer Mentoring Program at ECU

If you are a psychology student and were a mentee in the Peer Mentoring Program in either 1st or 2nd semester in 2009 and can spare 30-40 minutes of your time to participate in a qualitative research study, please contact me to arrange a time and place.

My name is Jaye Barclay. I am a psychology student at ECU and this research is for my Honours Thesis.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me on: jebacrla@our.ecu.edu.au
Alternatively
PH: [Redacted]

This research has ECU's Faculty of Computing Health and Science Ethics Committee approval.

Each participant chosen for this study will receive a $10 voucher from Aroma Cafe.

$10 Aroma Cafe Voucher
## Appendix F

### Reflective Journal

**Excerpt from Interview 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Code:</th>
<th>Participant 5, 19 Year Old Female Student</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Setting</td>
<td>School of Psychology Conference Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Conference Room</td>
<td>Rectangular in shape. Conference chairs dotted around the conference table. TV &amp; video equipment located in the right upper corner. Neutral coloured walls. Portrait of three lecturers on the left side wall. Window on the west corner looking out over the courtyard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere at Beginning of Interview</td>
<td>Jovial, relaxed. Participant appears eager to commence interview. I feel the need to slow things down, take care of ethical issues, participation information form and informed consent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere During Interview</td>
<td>Relaxed. Participant maintaining good eye contact. Pauses with each question, appears thoughtful prior to responding. Appears confident. Likewise I am feeling relaxed and receptive to the overall atmosphere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere at End of Interview</td>
<td>Participant appears to want to continue talking. Stated she enjoyed talking with me. Asked for feedback on research findings. Offered her email address. Debriefing then took place approximately 5 minutes. I felt the interview was a success, due to the fact the participant was relaxed throughout the process an. I was able to relax and concentrate on my interviewing skills.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>