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articipation in mentoring: Producing and reproducing identity Mentoring is becoming a popular learning and professional development strategy. Issues of identity permeate many stories of mentoring. One such story tells of a middle-aged unemployed man asked to mentor a young person at risk of leaving school early. Within the mentoring relationship, the mentor acts in new ways: he contacts Dick Smith and arranges a conversation with his mentee who was interested in flying. In another story, a beginning teacher wonders how she will relate to her allocated mentor, how her ideas will be treated and how her mentor might constrain or enable her to become the teacher she wants to be.

According to Wenger identity is a “way of talking about how learning changes who we are ... in the context of our communities” (1998, p.5), which is continually produced and reproduced in practical activity (Roth & Lee, 2007; Stetsenko & Arieivitch, 2004). Concepts from ‘communities of practice’ and cultural-historical activity theory are the starting point for exploring how participating in mentoring mediates the formation of identity, and how existing identities mediate participation in mentoring and the production and reproduction of identity in ongoing activity. Since mentoring has a history embedded with notions of apprenticeship, and more contemporary conceptualisations around partnership (MacCallum, 2007), another issue is how cultural notions of mentoring mediate the formation of identity. Stetsenko & Arieivitch’s proposition of the ‘self as a leading activity’ is used to examine how identity production in mentoring can be an activity and instrument of social change.