

Telementoring in the P-16+ Environment

Deborah A. Scigliano

Duquesne University, USA

INTRODUCTION

Telementoring takes the mentoring experience and transcends the boundaries of time and space (Harris, O'Bryan, & Rotenberg, 1996; Heider, 2005; McGee, 1997; O'Neill, 1996; O'Neill & Harris, 2004/2005). Telementoring is online mentoring. In these days of massive open online courses (MOOCs) that can serve thousands of people in one course (Daniel, 2012), telementoring offers a focused and personalized way to learn online. This article will discuss the implementation of telementoring in various learning environments to demonstrate the versatility and pragmatic uses that span age of learner and purpose of the telementoring experience. Recommendations for best practices will be offered to make telementoring partnerships as successful as possible.

BACKGROUND

Telementoring brings together an expert (telementor) and a learner or group of learners (teleprotégé/teleprotégés). The expert is known as a subject matter expert (SME). By acting as guides and with a project as a focus for learning, telementors facilitate interpersonal relationships while providing authentic learning opportunities (Kerka, 1998).

Protégé has been the sole term used in the literature to refer to the person who is being mentored online. The term protégé is also used in face-to-face mentoring. For the purposes of distinction between the face-to-face protégé and the online protégé, the term teleprotégé will be used in this article to refer to the person who is being mentored online. This is a self-coined term developed to provide the clear distinction of a person who is being mentored online and to bring symmetry to the language defining the roles in telementoring (telementor/teleprotégé).

One of the aspects of the focused and personal nature of telementoring involves the partnerships that are formed. The interpersonal relationships that are formed in traditional mentoring partnerships are also seen in telementoring. Lenert and Harris (1994) noted that developing relationships between the telementor and the teleprotégé was one of the greatest benefits of telementoring.

Telementoring provides flexibility in the mentoring relationship in that the interactions can occur at times that are convenient to the telementor and the teleprotégé. This convenience may make telementoring more attractive than traditional mentoring (Amill, 2002).

The use of project-based learning is another aspect that provides focus for the telementoring experience. Telementoring works best when there is a project or a specific task that is the central purpose of the partnership (Harris et al., 1996; Harris & Jones, 1999; Lenert & Harris, 1994; McGee, 1997; O'Neill, 1996; O'Neill & Harris, 2004/2005; O'Neill, Weiler, & Sha, 2005; Sanchez & Harris, 1996).

Telementoring has traditionally been used on a widespread basis in the P-12 learning environment. However, telementoring also takes place in higher education and in professional life.

There are several models of telementoring. The models include one-to-one, small groups of learners, and whole classes. One telementor is usually connected with the teleprotégé/teleprotégés. The design of the project and the needs/age of the learner determine the model that is selected (Scigliano, 2008).

The projects can involve a variety of disciplines and topics. The projects are as varied as the needs of the learners indicate. Some of the disciplines include science, the arts, and humanities, to name a few (Amill, 2002; O'Neill, 2001; O'Neill & Harris, 2004/2005; Sanchez & Harris, 1996; Scigliano, 1999).

The method of communication can be synchronous and asynchronous. Asynchronous communication is often text-based using email. Synchronous communica-

tion using video conferencing can be used. Software programs are available to support and facilitate telementoring partnerships (O'Neill et al., 2005).

The preceding overview of telementoring provides a foundation to examine its uses in these focused and personalized partnerships. The following sections will discuss the use of telementoring in basic education, higher education, and the professional world.

Telementoring in Basic Education

The predominant use of telementoring has been in the P-12 setting as it provides a way for teachers to connect their students with SMEs (Kerka, 1998). The uses of telementoring in the P-12 environment are varied. Two of the aspects that are addressed are meaningful usage of technology and differentiated instruction.

Telementoring provides the rich opportunity to connect technology with learning (Scigliano, 2008). Research has shown that there is a need expressed by educators to make meaningful use of technology (Tomei, 2001). The project-based learning that occurs in the telementoring process provides meaningful learning with a focused purpose.

Telementoring is a way for educators to differentiate instruction for their students. Instruction can be differentiated according to content, process, and product. Content is the subject matter; process is how the student learns the information, and product is an end result or tangible deliverable (Scigliano & Hipsky, 2010). Differentiating instruction holds many benefits for students. Some of these benefits include: a) increased achievement, b) learner empowerment, c) enhanced self-efficacy, d) increased understanding of content, and e) involvement of each child in the learning process (Chapman & King, 2005; Lewis & Batts, 2005; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006; Anderson & Algozzine, 2007; Richards & Omdal, 2007; Scigliano, 1999; Scigliano, 2011).

By connecting telementors with learners and providing students a choice in the learning project, both meaningful usage and differentiated instruction can occur. These are but two of the benefits of the telementoring process.

The following examples illustrate telementoring uses that show both meaningful use of technology and the use of differentiated instruction. These telementoring partnerships are indicative of the focused and

personalized nature of telementoring. In each partnership, specific goals were set for individualized learning that was facilitated by the process of telementoring.

O'Neill and Harris (2004/2005) discussed a 10th Grade Social Studies titled "Tracking Canada's Past." Students from multiple cities participated in this project each year for 10 weeks. One teleprotégé developed a particular interest in a Canadian figure whose fate continues to be debated by historians. The telementor acted as facilitator and asked guiding questions. The teleprotégé was given the opportunity to critically read the historical accounts and ultimately synthesize and evaluate them for herself.

In a drama telementoring study, Scigliano (1999) discussed the telementoring partnership between a children's theatre producer as the telementor and small groups of middle level students as the teleprotégés. The project goal was writing and enacting dramatic scenes. Each small group of two or three students wrote dialogues, scenes, and finally acted those scenes in front of a whole school audience. The telementor acted as a guide for each group as they wrote and revised their work throughout the duration of the project. Increases in confidence were reported by the teleprotégés. The telementor reflected about the teleprotégés' progress during the study that "...they have really grown as writers—clearly defined plots, characters we watch and care about, and conclusions" (Scigliano, 1999, p. 116).

Sanchez and Harris' 1996 study showed the telementoring relationship of a 10-year-old student who was working on an extracurricular project with a 74-year-old English professor Emeritus. One of the comparisons made by the student between her classroom learning and that of the telementoring experience was that she liked the immediacy of the feedback. The other noteworthy experience in this relationship was that the teleprotégé felt that the telementor understood her. She felt that she was being taken seriously when the telementor praised her vocabulary and questions.

Telementoring in Higher Education

As discussed in the previous section, telementoring has been used predominately in the

P-12 environment. However, telementoring is used in higher education at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Two examples of the use of telementoring in higher education will be discussed in this section.

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