Telementoring: Taking Learning Global

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Abstract
Telementoring transcends the boundaries of time and space. This online mentoring practice partners learners with subject matter experts from around the world. Learning can occur synchronously or asynchronously. The flexibility of time is one of the benefits of this practice. Best practices in telementoring will be discussed. Some of the practices to be discussed include preparing the telementoring to effectively engage with the teleprotégé, frequency of communication, and promoting a personal presence. Both telementoring research along with experiential practice will be examined. Examples from all levels of learning across schools and professional workplaces will be shown. The various models of telementoring will be discussed. Telementoring is a rich learning partnership that benefits the telementor and the teleprotégé. Telementoring brings specific benefits including personalized learning, deeper learning, flexibility, and creativity. The world becomes the classroom when telementoring is engaged.

Keywords: *Telementoring, online mentoring, e-mentoring, online learning, global education*

Introduction
Telementoring is online mentoring. It is based on traditional mentoring. One of the advantages of telementoring is that learning can occur at any time and any place. It transcends the boundaries of time and space [9, 13] This allows for experts and learners to interface with each other at times that are convenient to all. No longer are learners bound to a physical locality. Learning is global with the expertise of the world at your fingertips.

Overview of Telementoring
The practice of telementoring promotes the use of individualized learning that is highly relevant for the teleprotégé's needs. The online communication, whether by email or video-conferencing, allows for telementors and teleprotégés to engage in learning at times that are convenient for them. Telementoring involves a subject matter expert (SME) known as the telementor and the learner known as the teleprotégé [8]. The telementoring partnership has a number of elements in order to be successful. One of the most essential elements is creating relationships. This connectivity is a great motivator for learning [10]. Sharing relevant personal information is one way to start building the telementoring relationship and helping both the telementor and the teleprotégé to feel comfortable [3]. Telementoring works best with a project or a specific task [5]. Depending on the project or task along with the age and needs of the learner, the specific model can be selected [6]. Some of the models include whole group, small groups, and one-to-one.

Role of the Telementor
A telementor's role is that of facilitator, guide, and coach. The telementor needs to ask guiding questions, invite deep thinking, and encourage the teleprotégé to actively engage in the partnership [4, 7]. Preparation is an important element to consider in order to have a successful telementoring partnership. Part of this preparation includes informing the telementor of the goals of the project, the project's duration, along with the frequency of communication [10].

Feedback is part of the telementoring process. Telementors need to provide timely feedback that helps to move the project forward and help the growth of learning for the teleprotégé [10]. The relevant and age-appropriate feedback that is needed may be an area that requires guidance in the preparation phase. The educator may need to provide explicit information that helps the telementor to be successful in their role.

Telementoring in P-12 Education

The use of telementoring began in basic education. The sciences were the most widely-used subject area although any subject area works well with this practice. A tenth-grade social studies project was described in a telementoring study [4]. The project was titled "Tracking Canada's Past". This project involved students from multiples cities for ten weeks. The telementor was a facilitator and asked guiding questions. One teleprotégé investigated a Canadian figure whose ultimate role in history is still debated to this day. With the telementor's guidance, was able to read the historical records and draw her own conclusions based on the evidence.

Telementoring in Higher Education

One instance of higher education telementoring involved two professors from different colleges within the same major mid-Atlantic American university. In this particular telementoring project, the professors were the telementors and the teleprotégés [11]. This was an interdisciplinary partnership that involved advocacy and educational learning theories. The professors served as telementors in their area of expertise. They were teleprotégés learning alongside their students in the area of learning for their students' projects. A unique feature of this telementoring project was that the students in each class served as telementors for the other class. The exchanges took place mostly asynchronously through the University's Learning Management System. The discussion board was the most frequently used tool to communicate throughout the project. Exchanges were organically-generated by the students (teleprotégés) with very little prompting from the professors (telementors). Both the telementors and teleprotégés showed gains in learning of the subject matter that was the focus for their learning.

Telementoring in the Workplace

Telementoring plays a role in career and social support in global organizations through telementoring was discussed by [2]. The telementors acted as guides and coaches to help the teleprotégés to navigate situations in their careers. A trusting relationship was found to be an important element. Another benefit was a reduction in "….the effects of status differences since fewer social cues, and hence less face-to-face social interaction occurs, resulting in increased focus on organizational tasks" [2]. A dynamic global environment needs innovative ideas to sustain the relationship in mentoring and telementoring helps to achieve this goal [2].

Another area that is rapidly gaining in the use of telementoring is the medical profession. Surgical procedures and training are areas that show the importance of the role of telementoring. The benefits included the ability to access needed experts in real-time in places where face-to-face mentors were not feasible such as in rural areas. The researchers noted that telementoring has the ability to have a strong impact on teaching and sharing new techniques [14].

Lessons Learned: Tales of a Telementor

In addition to researching telementoring, this researcher has been a telementor [9]. The experience was enriching and enlightening. The experience provided me with valuable insights into the telementoring experience.

The research guided the telementoring practice. Best practices from the literature were used and proved to be invaluable. In order to make this reflection come alive, the first person will be used. My teleprotégé sought my expertise in writing. This middle school student wanted to write a play. The original duration of the project was to be six-weeks. This turned into a two-year long telementoring partnership through mutual agreement.

I started our partnership by sharing some relevant information about myself. This helped my teleprotégé to begin to know me as a person. This sharing of personal information offsets a phenomenon which is known as mechanomorphism [12]. This term means that in the absence of personal information, machine-like characteristics are attributed to the person on the other side of a computer-mediated communication. I clearly communicated goals, expectations, frequency of interaction, and feedback. It was important to have this clear communication. Along with clarity of communication came frequency of communication. Frequent communication was helpful to keep the project moving along. Time constraints on my part and that of my teleprotégé did necessitate changes to our frequency. Allowing for that flexibility was helpful to both of us.

An important lesson that I learned was of the power of feedback. My questioning invited my teleprotégé to think more critically and in a deeper manner. Specific actions that I offered were helpful and my teleprotégé was free to implement them or suggest other adaptations.

Following the best practices of the telementoring literature helped me to create and sustain a successful telementoring partnership. Adding flexibility and creativity into the experience promoted an enjoyable and enriching time for both myself and my teleprotégé.

Conclusion

Telementoring allows learning to connect learners and subject matter experts from around the world. This practice promotes individualized learning that is relevant and meaningful. The relationship that is built between telementor and teleprotégé helps to further the learning that is needed.

The increasing global need for sharing of expertise is met through the use of successful telementoring partnerships. The literature shows the best practices to promote these successful partnerships.

Engage the world with telementoring. Indeed, "The world is our classroom!" [1]. The potential of telementoring is only limited by our imaginations.

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