Chapter 7

"I'm Not Simply Dealing with Some Heartless Computer":
Videoconferencing as Personalized Online Learning in a Graduate Literacy Course

Peggy Lynn Semingson
University of Texas at Arlington, USA

Pete Smith
The University of Texas at Arlington, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter provides a case study example using cross-case analysis (Merriam, 2001) of digital mentoring within an online Master's level literacy course at a large public university in the Southwest United States. Two mentors provided individualized video conference sessions, using Blackboard Collaborate™ to 28 students (mentees). Data included written reflections from students as well as transcripts from selected videoconference sessions. Structured synchronous mentoring sessions provided a predictable framework for students and mentors alike. This chapter provides an analysis of the students' perceptions of the conferences, the types of discourse patterns and language analysis of the conferences, as well as description of themes and trends across the data. Suggestions on the usefulness of the conferences as well as the structure of mentoring sessions are described in the chapter. Established and emerging models of mentorship and e-development are outlined and utilized to frame the analyses and future research directions.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports on the results of an exploratory research study examining the uses, affordances, and constraints of individualized mentoring through desktop videoconferencing tools in an on-line graduate course in literacy studies. The study used real-time telecollaboration and synchronous digital mentoring to scaffold students' learning in an effort to bring the interpersonal aspects to an online-only teaching context. Both authors bring years of experience in working within online-only

or hybrid teaching contexts. The first author has been teaching online since 2008 and the second author is currently Vice President of the Division of Digital Teaching Learning at a large public university in the Southwest United States. In the summer of 2012 the university began a pilot project for a small group of selected faculty to integrate synchronous learning (Blackboard Collaborate™) into online teaching. The first author implemented regular use of Blackboard Collaborate for the purposes of individualized digital mentoring of students for this project.

A major purpose of implementing individualized synchronous learning sessions via regularly scheduled videoconferencing sessions was to increase the amount of personalized learning that took place in the course. Previous versions of the same course primarily relied on asynchronous discussion board conversations where students responded in writing to peers on the course readings. Therefore, digital mentoring was new to the two mentors (the lead instructor and a teaching assistant) on two levels. First, the mentoring component was new to the course and the regular use of the synchronous component was new to both mentors.

Throughout most of the chapter, the authors refer to graduate students in the class who participated in the mentoring sessions as "mentees". Nearly all of the mentees in the course reported that they had never engaged in any kind of synchronous learning activities as an online course requirement prior to this implementation in the summer 2012 course. However, several students indicated that they had engaged in synchronous learning as part of teacher professional development or in other contexts.

Following the summer 2012 course session, both authors wished to analyze the types of interactions and discussion topics that were taking place in the digital mentoring sessions. The authors also wished to know the students' perceptions of the sessions. Therefore, we used the case study format (Merriam, 2001) and qualitative analysis

(Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 2008) to examine program effectiveness of the videoconferencing component of an online graduate course. Evaluation of program effectiveness is an aspect of teacher education research that Chris Dede and colleagues describe in the following way: "The purpose of this type of research is to immediately measure the perceived value of program design components and content as well as to assess learner satisfaction." (Dede et al., 2005, p. 11). Furthermore, online learning is becoming a primary learning context (Allen & Seaman, 2010), yet the research to keep up with this subject within teacher education, and literacy education in particular, is lacking. Very little research literature exists in the area of specifically using digital mentoring with synchronous tools in teacher education. The two research questions that guided this study are listed below.

Question 1: What is the perceived impact of increased teacher presence done via synchronous, 1- on-1 videoconference mentoring in a graduate online literacy course?

Question 2: What is the development of teachers via digital mentoring, as documented in the qualitative data of session transcripts?

BACKGROUND

This chapter draws on several writers who describe the mentoring of adults as well as the broader literature of best practices with online learning and synchronous real-time learning, in particular. Research into academic mentoring has covered informal and formal mentoring in both undergraduate and graduate academic settings (e.g., Jacobi, 1991). Theoretical frameworks for the mentoring process, according to Jacobi (1991), are varied and multi-faceted, and can include social learning theory, academic and social learning, social support, and developmental support. Additionally, the study draws upon the key components of effec-

23 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/im-not-simply-dealing-with-some-heartless-computer/140645

Related Content

Evaluating Trends and Issues in Distance Learning
Seda Khadimally (2021). *Research Anthology on Developing Effective Online Learning Courses (pp. 1971-1986).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/evaluating-trends-and-issues-in-distance-learning/271243

Teaching Criminology and Police Science for Postgraduate Students at the Ruhr- University Bochum, Germany
Diana Zieglederand Felix Feldmann-Hahn (2010). *Web-Based Education: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools and Applications (pp. 1019-1035).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/teaching-criminology-police-science-postgraduate/41397

Personalized Online Learning: Context Driven Massive Open Online Courses
Benmedakhene Nadira, Derdour Makhloufand Mohamed Amroune (2021). *International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies (pp. 1-15).*
www.irma-international.org/article/personalized-online-learning/288050

Online Teaching Demands
Sorin Walter Gudea (2008). *Expectations and Demands in Online Teaching: Practical Experiences (pp. 113-136).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/online-teaching-demands/18665

A System for Automatic Evaluation of C Programs: Features and Interfaces
Amit Kumar Mandal, Chittaranjan Mandaland Chris Reade (2007). *International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies (pp. 24-39).*
www.irma-international.org/article/system-automatic-evaluation-programs/2992