
Conditions for the Success of Online Mentoring a Case Study

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Abstract

This paper reports on the findings about a mentoring project that failed. It is based on a case study in which the writer participated as a mentor of the staff members of the South African Department of Labour.

In 2002, the South African Department of Labour (DoL) published a tender ref: Services/ta/cst/p1/wp3 for Communications Skills Training for Staff of DoL. The project was known as the Business Communication Programme (BCP) and the European Union Commission for South Africa funded it. The crucial objective of the BCP was to develop work-based communication skills. This programme was designed to drive a redress and equity process of empowering learners of English as a second language and in particular black women and people with disabilities to advance in the system and to encourage learners to be more effective in the workplace.

The Subjects

Forty-nine learners and 14 mentors were observed in the Business Communication Programme (BCP) for two years from 2003 to 2005. The learners all came from the South African Department of Labour in Pretoria and the mentors came from SACHED, Wits University and the University of South Africa. The mentoring group consisted of two Indians who withdrew in the early stages of the programme, two black Africans and 10 whites. I was one of the two black mentors and my research supervisor was one of the white mentor experts from the University of South Africa. The learners' group comprised black and white adult females and black males. They were all South African speakers of English as a second language of post secondary school level.

Theoretical Framework

Online Mentoring

In order to put the issue of mentoring in its historical perspective, we begin by tracing the origins

of mentoring going as far back as 18 B.C. literature (Homer, 1955), where we learn that Mentor, in Greek mythology, was the faithful companion of Odysseus, King of Ithaca. When Odysseus set off for the Trojan wars, he left Mentor in charge of the household with particular responsibility for ensuring that the king's son, Telemachus, was raised to be a fit person as heir to his father's throne.

It is however worth noting that while some studies seem to recognise these classical underpinnings of mentoring (Hamilton and Darling in Hurrelman and Engel, 1989), some other research shows that basing mentoring on its origins creates an impression of myth and the world of fairy tales and fantasy (Murray, 2001).

Away from the Homeric era, various perceptions of mentoring have been proffered in recent times. Kram (1985) calls it "a developmental relationship that involves organisational members of unequal status, or less frequently, peers". Darwin (2000) even ventures into the possibility of juniors mentoring seniors in a workplace. A broader definition of a mentor is given by Hutto *et al* (1991), who defined a mentor as "an experienced, successful and knowledgeable professional who willingly accepts the responsibility of facilitating professional growth and support of a colleague through a mutually beneficial relationship". Nonetheless, for the purposes of this research, we will consider mentoring as a developmental relationship between a less experienced person and a more experienced person from an external mentor point of view and not just involving members of the same organisation.

Education in the cyberspace has been a subject of great debate since the late 1970's when the Internet was still in its infancy stage. Literature thus shows a proliferation of arguments for and against promoting education in virtual space. While some researchers glorify the evidence of reality in virtual space and the benefits that accrue with the advancement of the Internet technology (Bassi, Benson and Cheney, 1996), others have questioned whether in fact concepts like mentoring which seem to assume a strong social dimension can be promoted in a systematised channel like the technologically influenced cyber world (Kealy and Mullen, 2003). Where some research has challenged whether cyber technology can be used as a substitute for face-to-face education (Sinclair, 2003), proponents of the benefits of online education have argued that the two approaches are not comparable as they are affected by totally different circumstances and available resources, and are therefore aimed at solving different problems.

Although the debate is still out on the superiority of online education compared to the traditional methods of face-to-face education or indeed using post office mail or courier systems, it is clear that distance education practitioners will be eager to embrace the most effective mode of education in distance learning. With the undeniable reports that cyber education cuts down on distance and time, it is self evident that this mode is attractive and therefore it becomes important to invest in exploring what conditions are necessary for the success of this type of education.

Process writing

According to Song and August (2002), portfolio assessment of writing, which makes use of multiple writing samples produced at different times, has been found to be ideally suited to programmes that use a curriculum influenced by the writing process due to the fact that portfolios can accommodate and even support extensive revision. They can also be used to examine progress over a period of time, and can empower students to take responsibility for their own writing.

Research is rich in support of the use of the portfolio assessment system (Camp in Bennett and

Ward, 1993; Gill, 1993 and Herman and Winters 1994). Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2002) advocated the use of portfolios for students of English as a Second Language because they found them to be especially suitable for non-native English-speaking students. However, much as portfolio assessment promises huge benefits for curriculum and assessment, it also faces challenges. According to Brown and Hudson (1998) five disadvantages of using portfolio assessment can be identified as: the issues of validity, reliability, design decision, logistics and interpretation. These researchers found that portfolio assessments were time-consuming and that reliability and validity of the assessments remained unresolved in this type of assessment. Song and August (2002) further posed searching questions such as, how can we ensure that psychometric reliability such as scoring consistency is achieved in the portfolio assessments? How can we achieve scoring fairness? More crucially, the researchers ask how it can be established that portfolios adequately exemplify students' writing abilities so that the decisions made about students are accurate. In response to the questions raised on the issue of assessments, Yancey (1999) argues that scoring consistency can be achieved through negotiations among assessors. Huot and Williamson in Yancey and Weiver (1997) on the one hand, have supported portfolio assessments saying that the fact that the portfolio assessment system resists psychometric standardisation makes it a better assessment instrument, arguing that reliability and validity in the narrow psychometric sense are undesirable factors in evaluations. On the other hand, even researchers such as Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2002) who have supported portfolio assessments have conceded that reliability and validity are necessary if this type of assessment is to replace the other types because psychometric data tends to be more convincing to decision makers.

The Curriculum

The general assumption about the curriculum was that learners would start from Elementary tasks and proceed to the Intermediate and Advanced levels having acquired the lower level skills.

To achieve the required skills, learners were expected to work with a tutor who would have some face-to-face contact with the learners in a classroom/workshop learning situation to help learners pinpoint their particular difficulties in writing and to find solutions which would help them. Learners would further have the opportunity to use the tutor as an online colleague and editor during the programme.

The learners were also expected to submit a portfolio of work for each phase of the programme. The submission of the portfolio file was mandatory as an important part of the assessment that would lead to formal accreditation.

Below is the Curriculum of the Mentoring Activities

At the introductory level learners were required to:

- take notes
- write a memo or submission
- write a letter of confirmation
- edit one's own and others' work
- develop a workshop programme
- communicate information by e-mail
- write their CV
- write a letter of application

The Intermediate course required learners to:

- plan a project
- conduct a survey
- produce a proposal
- conduct meetings (notices, chairing, minutes)
- produce an action plan
- write a final report
- write an information pamphlet

In the Advanced course learners had to:

- summarise
- write a speech on behalf of a senior official
- write replies to Parliamentary Questions
- write about a workplace task

Research Context

In terms of the social and political reality, it is worthwhile noting that South Africa comes from a history of the apartheid system of government in which the white citizens dominated and discriminated against the black people. After many years of struggle by the black people, the apartheid rule ended in 1994, and with the coming of the new government, many changes were made to give a chance to the black people who had been deprived of quality education and job opportunities.

One of the changes made after 1994 was the policy of language. While in the apartheid regime the official languages of government were Afrikaans and English, Afrikaans received more prominence than English did (Silva, 1998). After 1994, the constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) advocated the use of eleven official languages. However, at the national and international level, communication in South Africa takes place in English (Silva, 1998) and English "has typically been seen as the language of liberation and black unity" (Gough in Silva, 1996: xviii).

At the South African Government level, different approaches have been prescribed in various South African Government papers such as the *Learnership Act of 1998* and the *National Skills Development Strategy of 2001*. The BCP programme was an example of an attempt by the Government to respond to work skills development in a workplace. Therefore, this was an important project and its success would have a bearing on the success of the South African Government policy.

Rationale for the Study

I decided to investigate the conditions that are necessary in implementing this type of learning with a view to informing those who would like to use this mode of teaching or learning so that lessons drawn from our experience could be used to prevent shortcomings. What inspired this research even more was that mentoring adult learners using computer and Internet communication was a fairly new practice in Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa in particular there was very little research showing approaches that combine mentoring and Internet learning methods at the time.

Objective

The study attempted to address the central question: What are the conditions for the success of the writing process in English using online mentoring in the workplace?

Research Methods and Design

I observed the subjects for a period of two years from 2003 to 2005. As I observed the programme, I consulted literature on the different aspects of online mentoring and the writing process in workplace settings. I was able to see a link between the literature and the problems which we were encountering on the programme. This was the basis for the formulation of the hypotheses.

The research was approached from a case study point of view. The initial plan was to collect data through quantitative questionnaires and analyse the data statistically (Nunan, 1992). Two questionnaires were designed to obtain data from the learners and mentors respectively. The response from the learners was not favourable enough. Because of the huge challenges encountered in running this programme, it was extremely difficult to get co-operation from some participants in answering the questionnaires sent to them in the aftermath. Out of the targeted 38 learners, only 6 were able to respond which represented 15% turn-over. Most of the participants referred to similar submissions they had made to the DoL/ EU (Morake 2004) report. Nevertheless, 6 of the 9 mentors who worked on the programme for a fairly long period were able to return their answered questionnaires, recording a 66% turn-over. With a good response from the 38 learners, validity and reliability were going to be enhanced. The poor response from the learners however posed a threat to the issue of reliability of the data as statistically, the collected data could not be representative enough. The study could therefore not lend itself solely to the quantitative design.

To defuse this potential threat to reliability, it was decided that the data collected be used in triangulation with the information left behind in the process of mentoring.

To strengthen reliability, I subjected the findings of the study to a form of local peer review (Nchindila, 2005): *Writing-process mentoring as a tool in workplace English learning* - a paper I presented at the 33rd Annual Conference of the South African Association for Language Teaching (SAALT) held from 4th to 6th July 2005 where I received useful comments about the challenges of mentoring in South Africa.

I further subjected the findings to an international peer examination (Nchindila, 2006): *Portfolio Assessment of Process-writing in Workplace English for Business Communication online Mentoring* - a paper I presented at the 5th Annual International Conference on Internet Education held from 11th to 13th September 2006 in Cairo, Egypt. At this conference I was able to confirm the importance of English as a second language in business communication in an environment where Arabic is the predominant language. I was also able to compare the levels of advancement in the use of technology in language learning in Southern Africa, North Africa and the developed world.

Through this triangulation a hybrid was achieved between quantitative and qualitative methods (Leedy, 1993) with low control of the data.

The reliance on a variety of sources in this study is well supported by the findings made by Yin (1994) who argued that one of the benefits of a case study is that it depends on multiple sources of data as evidence.

The study was guided by the following hypotheses:

1. The success of online mentoring depends on the degree of familiarity with all aspects of the programme shared by material writers, tutors, mentors and assessors.
2. The success of online mentoring depends on the quality of the relationship that is established between mentor and learner.
3. The success of online mentoring depends on the degree of motivation the learner feels both before and during mentoring.
4. The success of online mentoring depends on the participants' computer efficacy, including the adequacy of the hardware, software and the Internet aspects for interaction between mentor and learner.

Methods of Data Analysis

The information collected through the questionnaires was processed statistically using percentages. The hypotheses were tested by appreciating the major problems encountered on the programme with supporting evidence from the tender document, the learner manual, assessment guides, mentor and learner guidelines, reports, minutes of meetings, learner portfolios and learners and mentors' questionnaire results. The findings were then analysed in close consultation with previous research on the topic of online mentoring in workplace using a process approach to writing.

Findings

The Tender Document

The Tender Document reflected a strong awareness of the importance of motivation in a language development programme (Hypothesis 3), but does not mention relationships between learners and mentors (Hypothesis 2) or computer efficacy (Hypothesis 4) directly.

The importance of motivation can be seen in the following extracts from the Tender Document:

- “an accredited learning programme *adapted to the communication needs of the learners* will be developed
- accreditation would also provide learners ... with an incentive to engage in the learning programme
- “All training will be situational and context specific. It will be based on typical daily experience and involve role play, decision making and communicative and personal interaction within realistic circumstances.
- Our training materials will be adapted ... to reflect the actual circumstances which characterise the communicative needs of the Department of Labour” (p.3).

The BCP Learner Manual

The BCP learner manual contained the curriculum of activities. Each task had assessment guides to help the mentors guide their learners towards meeting the outcomes.

The BCP Learner Manual (2003:3) shows the importance of motivation (Hypothesis 3) in the

following extracts from the forewords in the three phases:

- “The BCP is based on needs expressed by people like yourself who want to improve their business writing and presentation skills and it has been divided in three phases so that people do only those parts of the programme that they need”.
- “...to build ...confidence and capacity to communicate effectively in the workplace, verbally and in writing and to make the programme the learners’ own”

The manual also reflects the awareness of relationships (Hypothesis 2) in the forewords stating that learners would have:

- “...contact with ...tutors”
- “...the opportunity to use.....tutor as on-line colleague and editor during the programme”

The Assessment Guides

The assessment guides were provided in the first BCP learner manual of 2003. They were revised in 2004 in an attempt to standardise mentoring and direct mentors to aspects of editing that certain mentors were overlooking. It is clear from the list of general editing guidelines for the assessment of Introductory Phase tasks that mentoring was meant to be comprehensive:

- The structure of text is coherent, logical and well sequenced.
- The text conforms to the major features associated with the text type.
- The text fulfils its purpose, and its register is appropriate to the audience and context.
- Major language errors are identified and the required changes are made.
- Layout, spelling, punctuation and small grammatical errors are checked and corrected where necessary.
- Information is checked for accuracy and correctness.
- The edited text makes use of plain, clear language and is clearly an improvement on the original.
- The final copy is proof-read to ensure that it is completely satisfactory.

In assessing the individual tasks, mentors were required to address content, organisation, language and presentation.

These assessment guidelines are relevant to Hypothesis 1 in that they emanated from the materials writer and provided the basis for all others – participants, trainers and mentors to share a common understanding of what was required. A report on the participant’s interaction with the mentor was also required, thereby providing information relevant to the hypotheses relating to relationships and motivation as well.

Mentor and Learner Guidelines

The first set of Mentors’ Guidelines was drawn up in July 2003 in order to standardise mentoring. As a result of these guidelines, some success was achieved by February 2004 when the first group completed one level. This could be seen as an indication of the success that could be achieved if the proposed conditions are put in place.

However, the mentoring continued to be unsatisfactory in several ways, and the consortium therefore revised the guidelines in February 2004.

The new guidelines focussed mainly on Hypothesis 3, although the editing guidelines remained, and the following instructions also imply an awareness of the need to standardise mentoring:

- “Make feedback explicit and not too cryptic to be of real use.
- Use the Outcomes to direct learners to aspects of the task to be achieved” (p.2).

There is also one instruction that relates to Hypothesis 2: “Be friendly and professional at all times ...” (p.2).

However, most of the new instructions in the Mentors’ Guidelines (2004: 3-4) suggest that the dominant concern by now relates to Hypothesis 3 –keeping participants interested and active:

- use workplace visits to gain an insight into the demands of the learner’s work environment and to deal with issues related to the learner’s writing and/or presentation skills
- use the opportunity to help the participant schedule her/his work in order to create a regular flow of work between the mentor and the learner
- return portfolios in a face-to-face meeting with the learner, especially if some tasks were still not regarded as competently done
- encourage learners to be equally pro-active in terms of checking whether the tutor had received work and/or returned work, which the learners may not have received
- aim at returning work within 48 hours of receiving it
- call or email the learner to explain and reschedule the return of drafts if, for any reason, you could not fulfil the promise made to return the work

In addition, these Guidelines introduced a new portfolio requirement: two real workplace tasks from each learner’s particular circumstances. This was the first recognition of the need to individualise the programme; despite the apparent authenticity of the original materials, it had become obvious that writing tasks that were performed by some DoL employees were never performed by others.

Reports

Consortium Reports

The consortium was required to submit monthly reports to DoL. These included a general report from the consortium plus reports by trainers, reports by mentors, and invoices for work done. In summary, it can be observed that the reports show a one way direction of posing the challenges by the mentors and trainers to the consortium and the Department of Labour. The reports seem to carry very little information showing how the problems posed were acted upon by the stakeholders for implementation.

The final report by Morake(2004) reported that of the initially targeted 60 learners, only 12 were able to complete a level. Of these, only 2 learners completed the Advanced level. This is proof of the general failure of the programme.

Minutes of Meetings Between DoL, the EU Representative and the Consortium

In the course of this mentoring training a number of meetings were held between the consortium and DoL with the representatives from the European Union who were attached to this programme. As a result, a rich resource of information was produced. Of relevance to the

Hypotheses covered in this research the study reviewed Minutes of nine of the ten meetings held from July 2003 to May 2004. The findings from the Minutes showed concerns raised by the stakeholders about the slow rate at which reports were presented, how unsatisfactory the mentoring was, a high rate of learners who dropped out and the need for specific assessment guidelines for learners. As the meetings were supposed to be conducted monthly, the reviewed Minutes represent 90% of the deliberations that took place concerning this programme. Therefore, the findings from these Minutes do significantly represent the real picture of the activities that took place on the programme.

Mentoring Activities

The writing of the portfolio tasks was the hub of the mentoring that took place. The mentors' comments were therefore crucial in this exercise. The information from selected samples of the mentors' comments shows that there was a wide range of approaches in the way learners were guided. Besides, learners were mentored by different mentors.

Learner Lists Showing Learner Workplace Sections

Learners came from ten different sections of the Department of Labour. These were: National Skills Fund (NSF), Employment Services (ES), Planning Unit (PU), Programme Management Unit (PMU), Training and Development (TD), National Skills Authority (NSA), Management Services (MS), Skills Development Planning Unit (SDPU), Public Relations (PR), and Human Resources Management (HRM).

It can be concluded from this information that learners had specific needs according to the requirements of their sections. The data therefore reflect the need for collaboration in materials development so that training is tailored to the specific learner needs (Hypothesis 1). If learners' needs are catered for learners would feel motivated to complete the course (Hypothesis 3).

The Questionnaires

The main aim of the questionnaires was to test the validity of the hypotheses as they applied to the case study of the mentoring done.

Findings From the Learners' Questionnaire

Thirty-eight questionnaires were issued to the learners who took part in the programme only six filled them. The first part of the questionnaire was based on a five-point-scale. The final part requested the learners to choose from four options.

The results are summarised as follows:

Regarding collaboration in training and mentoring (Hypothesis 1), the information can be summarised as follows:

- (i) No learner believed that training and mentoring had similar teaching aims
- (ii) No learner believed that mentors had similar teaching aims

It can be concluded that the need for Hypothesis 1 was significant among the learners who responded to the questionnaire.

Concerning learner and mentor relationship (Hypothesis 2), the results were that half of the learners believed that mentors were not helpful.

Regarding the need for motivation, the results were that most respondents agreed that:

- (i) Learners learnt a lot from mentoring=66% which is motivating to the learners (Hypothesis 3).
- (ii) Mentors returned work in stipulated time =83% which must have motivated learners to work on their drafts in good time.

It can be concluded from these results therefore that the programme attempted to motivate learners.

However, the results also showed that the learners had mixed feelings in the way they felt motivated. For instance whereas half of the learners believed that the BCP was relevant to their daily work and that mentoring improved their writing ability, 83% of the respondents reported that pressure of DoL work interfered with their mentoring. Similarly, few learners felt that:

- (i) BCP catered for the learners' needs= 33%
- (ii) Contact sessions taught learners a great deal =17%
- (iii) Learners returned their work in stipulated time= 17%

What is even most striking about these results is that the highest number of learners (83%) reported that *mentors returned work in stipulated time* while the same number reported that *pressure of DoL work interfered with their mentoring*. From this sharp contrast, it can be argued that learners perceived the negative effects of motivation as coming from the challenges they faced from their workplace rather than from the commitment of their mentors.

Aspects of the need for learner computer efficacy (Hypothesis 4) can be deduced from the response that 50% of the learners believed that mentoring improved their writing ability because computer efficacy helps learners to write well just as the awareness of improved writing skills gives learners a sense of fulfilment leading to motivation. However here again, the result shows that only half of the learners believed that they benefited from the use of computers.

In summary, the results showed a mixed response of the learners in relation to the four hypotheses under consideration. However, because of the poor yield of the filled questionnaires returned by learners, these findings may not be conclusive. Nevertheless, these results are suggestive and were therefore used in support of other findings from the various sources identified for the study.

Findings From the Mentors' Questionnaire

Eleven questionnaires were sent to the mentors who took part in mentoring up to May 2004. Nine mentors responded.

In the first part of the questionnaire, mentors were asked to agree or disagree with the statements.

Concerning collaboration in materials development and training (Hypothesis 1) the information shows that few mentors were

- Involved in initial planning=17%
- Involved in writing course material=17

Similarly, all the mentors who responded reported that there was too much record-keeping and that there was not much collaboration in portfolio assessment. Most of them also reported that this was their first experience=83%. However, most mentors also reported that they were

- Involved in mentoring=100%
- Involved in some contact teaching=67%.

This is evidence that there was some collaboration in mentoring and teaching. In fact, the fact that all the mentors reported that they were involved in mentoring proves that the questionnaire was given to the right audience.

These data suggest that the responses were mixed as far as Hypothesis 1 was concerned. Nevertheless the responses lean on the negative side since four out of the six items tested concerning this hypothesis are negative. It can be concluded therefore that 66% of the respondents were negative leaving 44% who were positive.

Regarding relationships (Hypothesis 2), the summary shows that all the mentors believed that:

- Gender was not an issue=100%
- Race was not an issue=100%

Motivation can be looked at in two ways: (a) Learner motivation and (b) Mentor motivation.

Although learner motivation is more important than mentor motivation, it is necessary to look at both because mentoring is a special type of teaching that requires both learners and mentors to be totally committed to the programme if mentoring has to work. In terms of learner motivation the results were that:

- very few of the mentors believed that mentoring improved learners' spelling and punctuation=17%
- none of the mentors believed that mentoring improved learners' grammar
- none of the mentors believed that mentoring improved learners' ability to write clearly,
- none of the mentors believed that mentoring improved learners' ability to organise ideas
- none of the mentors believed that mentoring improved learners' awareness of audience and purpose
- most of the mentors believed that the learners' language skills did not improve=66%
- none of the mentors reported that learners returned their work in stipulated time
- all the mentors believed that most of the learners lacked commitment

These items relate to motivation because they are elements of achievement and any sense of achievement inspires the learner to work harder. These results show that most of the mentors' beliefs about the learners' achievement were negative.

However, there is also evidence of a positive response as 66% of the mentors believed that the mentoring improved learners' computer skills. Nevertheless, this view was just one out of the nine items tested concerning learner motivation. The results therefore incline toward the negative perception by 8/9 or 88%. This perception is therefore significant.

Although mentor motivation may not be crucial because mentors are expected to be motivated

since teaching is their duty, it is important to note that most of the mentors felt that “mentoring dragged on too long=66%”. Similarly, the information shows that all mentors felt that “mentoring involved too much record-keeping”. Although the issues of record-keeping fall under the need for agreement on management reporting procedures (Hypothesis 1), if reporting procedures are cumbersome, they can be quite demoralising to mentors. This can lead to mentors’ loss of motivation.

The study therefore supports the view that the awareness of the four hypotheses discussed could help in addressing these problems. The four hypotheses are therefore confirmed.

Discussion

All the problems noted here provide lessons to those who would like to use online mentoring. As a result of the challenges experienced on the programme which were not initially planned the programme did not operate smoothly and outcomes were not all met. Therefore training providers who would like to profit from this type of education must carefully plan and implement the requirements if they have to succeed.

This study posits that the following conditions would lead to success:

Assessments

Success concerning portfolio assessments would be measured by mentors’ experience and expertise and how closely related the curriculum, the syllabus and the learning tasks are to the job tasks of an individual learner including the standardisation of training, making commentaries and applying the assessments objectively to the agreed outcomes.

Mentoring Relationships

The success indicator for this condition would be evidence of shared purpose, how well the learners and mentors are matched against the learners’ needs and mutual trust and confidence shown between mentors and learners.

Motivation Online

The success indicators of motivation would be measured in terms of the specific adequate time given for fulfilling the mentoring tasks, the adequacy of the resources, learners’ support from their workplace supervisors and mentors, learners and mentors’ punctuality in responding to online tasks, and learners’ drive and ability to complete the programme levels thereby keeping the number of dropouts to a minimum.

Computer and Internet Efficacy

In terms of computer and Internet efficacy, success for this condition would be measured by the suitability of the computers for the writing process tasks, the ability and confidence that learners and mentors would display in the use of computers and their versatility in utilising Internet resources for the purposes of online learning. Learners would show knowledge of Internet surfing techniques, grammar, spelling, editing, and file saving functions. Trainers would show

knowledge of the Word comment function, useful educational Internet search engines and ability to use standard correction software.

Conclusion

Although this study reports a failed mentoring experience, the benefits of the lessons to be learnt outweigh the project's shortcomings in that this project was bold enough to test the use of Internet education and mentoring in a multiracial ESL learning African context. As reported in the literature (Magagula 2005), computer and Internet efficacy are still challenging issues in adult education in Africa. This study therefore underscores Magagula's findings for the benefits that can be drawn when computer and Internet conditions are set in place in training adult learners in a workplace setting in Africa.

However to be forewarned is to be forearmed. The triumph of this study lies in the fact that it is able to share research on a failed project. As mentoring may take different forms, many practitioners might claim successful implementation of mentoring programmes. Nevertheless, as far as e-mentoring is concerned it is important to realise that in cross-cultural Africa, e-mentoring will only succeed if mentoring conditions are correctly configured before and during the implementation of the programme.

The findings of this study are based on a single case study. Therefore they might not be generalised. Furthermore, as the researcher was quite close to the data by taking part in the programme as a mentor, this study might be said to be subjective.

This study was part of a Masters degree research registered at the University of South Africa in 2004.

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Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, Volume X, Number II, Summer 2007
University of West Georgia, Distance Education Center
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