Foreword

When I was hired by Carol Muller in 1998 to be the first Mentoring Specialist and Research Associate for MentorNet, I knew that I was joining a pioneering group who was breaking new ground. After all, it had only been since 1994 that Netscape had made the World Wide Web more accessible to the general public. With Netscape, the business potential of the Internet was immediately recognized. What was more uncertain was the potential that the Internet held for educational or social purposes. So we experimented by developing MentorNet (originally founded in 1995 as the Dartmouth College Women in Science E-mentoring Program), a telementoring program pairing women college students in science and engineering with professionals outside of academic settings.

We were not the only ones experimenting with telementoring. Other pioneering programs, such as the Electronic Emissary Project, DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology), Telementoring Young Women in Engineering and Computing Project and what became the International Telementoring Project, were also experimenting with this fairly new medium for educational and social justice purposes. While the foci of the programs were varied, many, if not all, of these programs came to some common conclusions. Mainly, that the telementoring relationships established through programs don’t just work on their own, they need support. We found that engaged program facilitators had to make good matches, provide regular coaching or prompts to assist the development of the relationships, and intervene when necessary. Also, some of the programs offered group telementoring opportunities to expand the connections among the participants or to serve as a safety net for when the one-on-one relationships were not working.

So it is with great pleasure that over a decade later, I am writing a Foreword to a book that is celebrating the potential telementoring is realizing for improving K-12 educational systems. Telementoring in the K-12 Classroom: Online Communication Technologies for Learning is a must-read for anyone interested in or involved in telementoring for a K-12 audience. If you are interested in starting a telementoring program, or improving a program you are already conducting, this book can provide insights into the process. If you are a researcher interested in programmatic, design, and research issues, this book is for you. Telementoring in the K-12 Classroom addresses issues regarding designing, implementing, and researching telementoring programs. These chapters reflect the current thinking, most pressing issues, and required features of any program.

As I have read these chapters, I am struck that although telementoring programs have been designed, revised, evaluated, and researched for over a decade, over the half of the chapters address technology and design issues. What this tells us is that telementoring programs are highly flexible. They can provide mentoring opportunities unconstrained by time and space. The protégés can be K-1 students, college students studying to be teachers, school or college students with disabilities, or novice teachers just start-
The mentors can be professionals with varied expertise who directly mentor students or who mentor the students’ teachers. The mentors can also be more advanced education college students, novice teachers, or master teachers and may, or may not, be persons with disabilities. The goals of telementoring can be to provide subject matter expertise, to retain education students by giving them a glimpse of their future profession, or professional development. So while some general principles for developing and implementing telementoring programs can be widely agreed upon, each program requires its own set of technology, design and program decisions.

The first section of this book, “Telementoring: Implications for Practice,” addresses issues around the design and programmatic features of telementoring programs. If you are planning to develop a telementoring program or have one underway, these chapters will address important issues such as supporting successful telementoring relationships, along with identifying program goals and matching curricula to meet those goals. These chapters also provide practical ways to leverage the expertise of a team of subject matter experts in order to help school students with assigned projects, where the range and scope of the projects would be beyond the knowledge base of any one teacher. Throughout these chapters, we are reminded that the point of telementoring programs is to enhance the knowledge or self-efficacy of the protégés, whether students or novice teachers, and that we can draw from our vast knowledge-base of effective classroom practices to inform the telementoring practices.

In “Telementoring: Addressing the Needs of Persons with Disabilities,” the authors present examples of how telementoring has been effective in providing mentoring opportunities to protégés with disabilities. These authors explain how it is not enough to offer mentoring through electronic means to open up the opportunities for protégés with disabilities. Rather, they provide practical program-based and research-based advice for developing programs in such a way that they not only reduce barriers but also address issues of full-inclusion for students, teachers, and administrators with disabilities. These authors make recommendations for program features that are inclusive not only for persons with disabilities but for all. They focus on ways to make sure that the programs are self-empowering for the protégés with disabilities, and they highlight side benefits of such programs, such as when mentors without disabilities replace inaccurate, stereotypical views with enhanced, more realistic views of the abilities and employability of their protégés with disabilities.

The chapters in “Telementoring: Professional Development” provide examples of successful telementoring programs and demonstrate how relying on concepts, such as reflective practice, or theoretical perspectives from science education can enhance telementoring programs for education students or novice teachers. In these chapters, we learn of a successful program requested by pre-service education students who wanted to learn what teaching was really like, before they began their in-service training. Another chapter provides an insightful look at using reflective practice as a mechanism for building trust and establishing effective mentoring relationships that do not have the benefit, or the burden, of visual cues. The final chapter draws from the lessons of science education to present the potential of developing professional learning communities virtually as part of a telementoring program. These chapters help the readers to think conceptually and practically about using telementoring to provide mentoring for future or novice teachers.

The final section “Telementoring: Web 2.0 Technologies” keeps us up-to-date on the latest technologies that can be leveraged to provide opportunities for telementoring. Web 2.0 technologies refer to the many new web applications that allow for information sharing and social networking, such as blogs and wikis. Telementoring came along in its earlier incarnations because researchers, program developers, and social entrepreneurs were creative at using new technologies to provide mentoring opportunities that
otherwise may not exist. These two chapters make us aware of how to leverage the latest technologies to expand and enhance current telementoring opportunities. Moving to leverage these new technologies seems natural for the field of telementoring, which has often been on the cutting edge.

Telementoring in the K-12 Classroom is a great resource for newcomers and veterans to the field of telementoring. The insights are directed toward how to use electronic communications to support students and teachers who are a part of K-12 educational systems. Nonetheless, the depth and breadth of the ideas presented can inform anyone who wants to improve the within classroom experiences for students by bringing in resources available over the Web, to inform pre-service education teachers as they are exploring their future career opportunities, or to support novice teachers as they are putting their newly found knowledge into practice. This book will get you to think about telementoring, its promises and possibilities, in a new way.

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