

A Conceptual Framework for Electronic Mentoring for People with Special Needs (Poster)

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Abstract

Recently, a growing number of electronic mentoring (e-mentoring) websites have become available to provide vocational and career support. E-mentoring, which refers to a mentoring relationship conducted via Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), appears to be an accessible alternative for people with special needs. To date, few researchers have addressed the phenomenon of e-mentoring from a socio-emotional perspective for people with special needs (McDonald, Balcazar, & Keys, 2005; Miller & Griffiths, 2005).

In response to this challenge, we conducted a pilot study which explored the feasibility and relevance implications of computer-mediated support (CMS) for youth with special needs (Shpigelman, Reiter, & Weiss, 2008). The three-month e-mentoring intervention program was based on mutual self-disclosure and socio-emotional support for five mentor-protégé pairs with a wide range of disabilities (physical, emotional, behavioral or intellectual impairments). The pairs were instructed to communicate via email and also to meet FTF on either one or two occasions at the protégé's school during the three-month e-mentoring intervention. Qualitative content analysis of the electronic correspondences showed that the development of the e-mentoring relationship paralleled the process typically seen during FTF mentoring; a rapport developed between the mentor-protégé pairs, becoming a positive and supportive relationship (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). In addition, communicating via email appeared to reduce the visibility of the participants' disability, which enabled them to speak about life experiences (e.g., family, friends, hobbies, studies) and to help them feel that they are more like typical youth. The findings provided support for the feasibility of CMS for youth with special needs.

Based on our preliminary results and on a literature review, we developed a conceptual framework which delineates the electronic socio-emotional support (ESES) process for people with special needs. As illustrate in Figure 1, the process commences by an individual with special needs who seeks electronic support. Certain preconditions, such as hardware and software, computer literacy skills, mentoring training enable and facilitate the process. The ESES path may supply informational support, tangible assistance, social support and/or emotional support. The final outcomes occur to the individual through a process of synthesizing information, thoughts and feelings, and deriving meaning from the support experience. These may lead to positive changes of the individual. Further exploration of the feasibility of the ESES framework for people with special needs is needed (Shpigelman, Reiter, & Weiss, in press).

Keywords: electronic mentoring, online support, computer-mediated communication, people with special needs, disabilities.

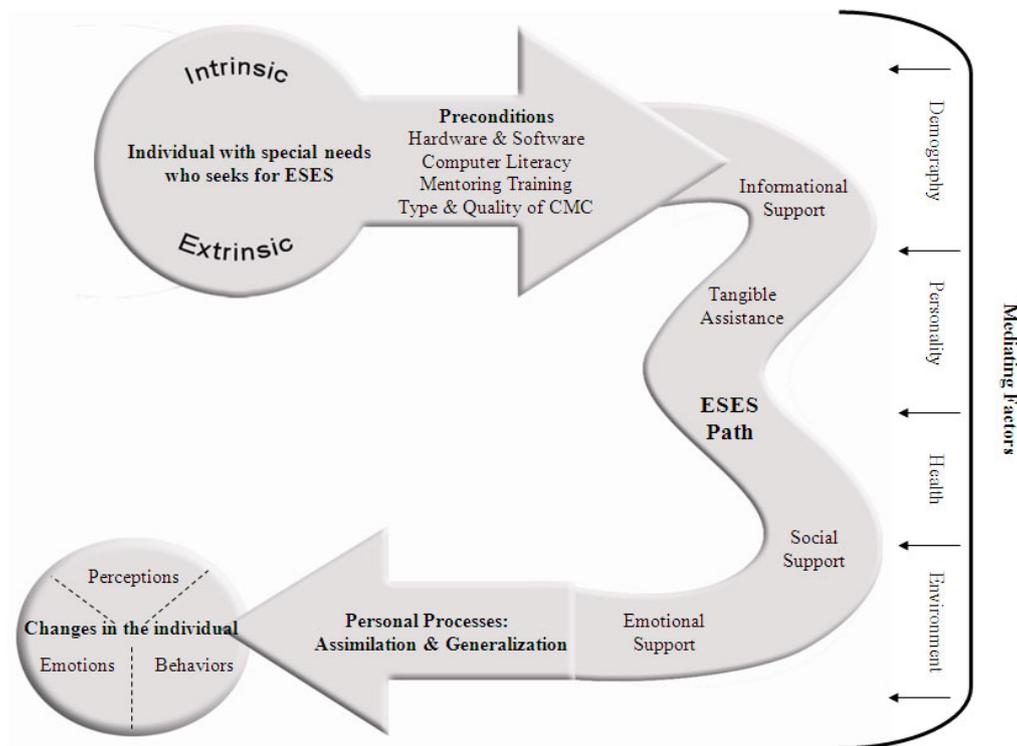


Figure 1. Electronic Socio-Emotional Support (ESES) Process

Reference

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