

E-Mentoring Across National Boundaries

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Abstract: Computer-based mentorship, or e-mentorship, is a beneficial mentoring technique that promotes independence and self-efficacy among the individuals being mentored, with and without a disability¹ (McDonald, Balcazar & Keys, 2005; Smith, 2008; Stumbo et al., 2010). E-mentorship increases and broadens the individual's communication and social skills and increases knowledge about overcoming community participation barriers. It also increases the visibility of individuals with disabilities by integrating them with the non-disabled, and allowing both sides to share views and experiences. Before introducing face-to-face programs, introducing an e-mentoring program will help build and empower youth²² with disabilities in one country by using an existing mentor group based in a different country and the active resources of a traditional mentorship program committed to these activities. E-mentoring has the potential to expand mentorship programs from more economically developed western industrialized countries (such as UK or USA) to developing countries: across boundaries.

Keywords: Technology, mentoring, youth with disabilities

Introduction

In this paper I want to explain why expanding mentorship programs in countries like the United States of America to developing societies, like some South and Central American countries, could complement or even enhance the development of youth with disabilities.

What is Mentorship?

The idea of mentorship can be traced back to ancient Greece. In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus, before he left Ithaca for the Trojan War, entrusted the education of his son, Telemachus, to an old friend named Mentor (Acomb, 2013). From this story the English language adopted the word “mentor”, which is defined as a counselor, supporter, and overseer of an individual's development (Thomas, 2001; Bierema & Merriam, 2002; Mezas & Scandura, 2005 ; Acomb, 2013). In this example, Telemachus, the object of Mentor's efforts, is referred to as the mentee or protégé (Burgstahler & Cronheim, 2001).

In our society, education is critical to the development of the individual - it improves the chances for him or her to secure employment and fit into society. Entrusting someone with this guidance, a mentor, is extremely beneficial for both the mentor and the protégé. Mentorship, or the role developed during the interaction between mentor and protégé, is described in the literature as encompassing a wide variety of activities: counseling, role-modeling, guiding and networking (Acomb, 2013; Burgstahler & Cronheim, 2001).

Types and Benefits

The traditional definition of mentoring describes a hierarchical relationship between a senior and junior members of the same organization (Mezias & Scandura, 2005), but in a more generic sense, mentorship is a relationship that develops between two individuals: a mentor and protégé. As such, as Burgstahler and Cronheim (2001) indicate, it can develop in many different ways, depending on the context. Mentorship relationships can be formal or informal, categorized by the type of “connection,” or social/racial/cultural bond between the mentor and his/her protégé, and molded by the social context of the relationship. For example, work-related relationships are more formal in nature and consequently generate more formal types of mentorship programs, but sometimes relationships are developed in a more spontaneous way, therefore leading to more informal connections (Mezias & Scandura, 2005). As such, formal connections may lead to informal ones. Therefore both types may be combined in a program.

Acomb states that some mentorship relationships are informal and unstructured (Acomb, 2013, p. 125), since they are driven by the personality of both individuals. Buchanan (2005) lists different types of relationships: student to student, educator to student, or professional to student, in a mentor-protégé structure. As these relationships can be informal, they can be formal and structured too (Mezias & Scandura, 2005), as those defined in a computer based programs. These connections, or the channels of communication between all members, can develop either as hierarchically defined directional and vertical communications, or as layer defined horizontal ones. Regardless of the type, these relationships develop in an emotional context which is also defined by diversity - marked by cultural, social, age, and gender categories and experiential trends (Buchanan, 2005).

Many of these categories, such as gender, define relationships. Darling, Bogat, Cavell, Murphy and Sanchez (2006) affirm that boys and girls construct their interpersonal relationships in mentorship groups either with mentors or other protégés in two different types: instrumental for boys and psychosocial for girls. The instrumental type is more active and goal-setting oriented, and the psychosocial type is more emotional or personality-development oriented. Beyond gender stereotypes, both of these exemplify types of relationships that should be considered when creating connections in a formal structured program or when monitoring and orienting emerging connections in a more informal one.

Another structure that may emerge is a peer to peer relationship, where communication flows in a more horizontal manner, and mentors share their experiences and approaches to different situations, expanding their emotional and social connections.

Regardless of the relationship layout and mentorship type, both individuals benefit from these relationships. As in other social relationships, such as immediate family (grandparents, parents, and siblings) or close friendships, and not just for individuals with disabilities, both individuals play fundamental roles (Burgstahler, 1997). In these relationships both mentors and protégés provide information, counsel, and guidance when appropriate, which flows in both directions, and doing so form a bond of dependency and “belonging” (Burgstahler & Cronheim,

2001s).

For mentors, besides the inherent benefits of a social relationship, the benefits also include the encouragement to set goals for another individual, and the chance to share and prove different strategies and set more personal challenges, in the case of computer based mentoring, like Disabilities, Opportunities, Interworking and Technology (DOIT) (for more on the DOIT project see the section in this article, “Using Existing E-mentoring Communities for Protégés with Disabilities”), particularly around communication skills and outreach efforts (Burgstahler & Cronheim, 2001). For protégés, the biggest benefit is access to role models.

In summary, in a computer based context, benefits include the possibility of broadening his/her mentor and protégé network, providing access to experience and advice, and the opportunity to develop technological and communications skills. These translate into a social network expansion effect.

These benefits of mentoring increase by adding cross-cultural diversity to the mentoring context as in programs across boundaries (Groce, 2004). In the organizational context of mentorship, Cox and Blake (1991) argue that the cross-cultural diversity characteristic of a workgroup increases creativity, problem solving, and adaptability by exposing it to more competition and diverse socio-cultural scenarios. This is true for non-organizational types of mentorship programs as well.

Mentoring and Disability

As stressed by the United Nation Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (2007) in the editorial of their *Innocenti Digest* No. 13, mentoring can be a valuable tool to enrich young people with disabilities while they prepare for adult life. According to this article, most young people with disabilities across the world are often not provided with enough development possibilities early in their life. They often lack opportunities such as primary and secondary education, or life-skills and vocational training that are more easily available to other young people. This oversight and their higher propensity for abuse is stressed by the fact that young people with disabilities are often ignored or dismissed (UNICEF, 2007, p. vii). Mentoring is a tool to address some of the rights for youth with disabilities, described in the United Nations 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), such as upholding child non-discrimination policies, accommodating to the best interest of the child, procuring child survival and development, and respecting the views of the child (UNICEF, 2007). Another state-defined treaty is the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which embraces similar principles as the UNCRC but with a broader scope. But although it has no explicit mention of adolescents as a specific category, according to Kett (2012) young people with disabilities played a significant role in the drafting of the Convention. Their needs and interests are incorporated in the Convention because it spells out the needs/issues of skill development and education of all people with disabilities.

Statistics

Just based on the numbers indicated below I argue the value of mentorship programs for young people with disabilities, both as supportive or alternate avenues to conventional educational programs, primarily in developing countries. Stumbo et al. (2010) state that approximately 3 million individuals between 5 and 15 years old and 24 million individuals ages 16 to 64 years experience disability in the United States. Globally, though estimating the number of young adults that live with a disability worldwide is complex (Filmer, 2008), it is estimated at roughly 180 million. Based on UNICEF projections, this number grows every year (Groce, 2004). For example, in Italy in a ten year span the number of young people with and without disabilities enrolled in primary schools rose from 2.5 million to 7.6 million, while the number of teachers increased from 38,000 to 90,000 (UNICEF, 2007, p. 29). Considering this scenario, as a realistic progression in any society for adolescents with disabilities, and noting Spencer's (2006) estimate that 2.5 million adults serve as volunteer mentors to young people in the United States, I believe increasing mentorship (rather than formally enlisting more educators) can be a means of addressing this student-teacher gap.

If we project these numbers to the developing world, we count that about 80%, or 180 million, of these young individuals live in developing countries (Groce, 2004), and additionally, as Groce (2004) states, they live among the poorest and most marginalized populations in these countries. Therefore any educational program targeting developing countries, where disability can be associated with poverty and low schooling attainment for youth (Filmer, 2008), must consider the economic limitations or restrictions for young people with disabilities. A cross-national venture might address some of these limitations, because of the resources and infrastructure available in more western industrialized economies.

Therefore any mentoring program that targets youth with disabilities can leverage socially pre-defined education structures, like those of tutoring or home schooling programs and ultimately make those structures more accessible and relevant (McDonald et al., 2005). By achieving this, some of these programs can reach out to segregated young people with disabilities, who experience limited access to education (Burgstahler, 1997) because of social and physical diversity, evidenced though accessibility barriers. Therefore, mentoring programs must embrace social diversity by actively engaging youth and mentors with a variety of forms of disability, as well as other categories of sociocultural diversity (UNICEF, 2007). As they increase the social and vocational dimensions for young people, they broaden the number of teacher and student networks and providing more opportunities for education, coaching and social support (Mezias & Scandura, 2005). Mentoring for young people with disabilities not only may bridge these social barriers but also reach beyond the more conventional education channels which shadow the gaps generated in a young adult's life by these limitations.

Transitions in the individual's development, from school to different types of professional or vocational employment, require structures, often socially defined, to support the change process (Stumbo et al., 2010). Institutions like schools, clubs, gyms and even friends, family, and

non related adult mentors serve this purpose. Scholars, such as McDonald, Keys, and Balcazar (2007) and also statements from the UNCIEF (2007) agree that these support networks may be scarce for young people with disabilities. Therefore, the most critical function for mentoring programs oriented towards young people with disabilities are to ease any anxieties that arise during these transitions, improve the individual's social competence, improve his or her disability-related skill set and increase their motivation to succeed (Stumbo et al., 2010).

Adolescent Development

Research by Spencer (2006) supports the idea that young people's relationships with non-parental adults, for example mentors, promote adolescent development. For young people with and without disabilities, this development is determined by the child to adult transitions mentioned before, where these non-parental role models promote success. For this reason, in countries such as the United States, many mentorship programs specifically targeted at youth with disabilities share a common goal: to facilitate successful transitions (Stumbo et al., 2010).

Commonly, young adults go through these stages with institutional support, from the corresponding schools, colleges, or places of employment, and during the transition phases between these, with support from family, peers and other role models. These transition supporters acting as formal or informal mentors provide guidance and information that individuals require while traversing a transition. Darling et al. (2006) characterize these transitions as cognitive and contextual, defined by the cognitive development stage of the individual and the socio-cultural context. And they define them as phases determined by the normative changes in family and school, individual's biological changes, and social changes like adaptive parent-child dynamics and increased exposure of the young adult to peers.

Due to social stereotypes, lack of social visibility and accessibility issues, the transition from childhood to adulthood for adolescents with disabilities is more challenging because of limited access to information on health and sexuality, and overall vocational life skills which create developmental barriers (UNICEF, 2007). Groce (2004) affirms that for adolescents with disabilities these barriers are accentuated by social factors such as prejudice, isolation and discrimination.

Mentorship focused on protégés with disabilities, and computer based programs specifically, may undermine these barriers by reducing the stigma associated with disabilities first by widening the mentoring peer-to-peer networks, second by pairing mentors without disabilities and protégés with disabilities. Third, it does so by publishing more information on the definition and types of disability and how to interact with individuals with disabilities; as McDonald et al. (2005) concluded, stigma or social stereotypes are driven by misinformation. These three actions will increase social visibility of youth with disabilities, and due to these, exposure to information and will eventually reshape the relationships between these young individuals and family members, friends, peers and other members of their society. They will also counteract prejudice and discrimination by increasing the adolescent's peer exposure

engaging them in more social activities (Burgstahler, 1997).

To summarize, adolescents with disabilities experience more social and physical exclusion (McDonald et al., 2005). I argue that a cause and effect of this exclusion is the degree of visibility of the individual with a disability in society. On one hand if the individual is not visible it is difficult to integrate him/her into society; in other words he/she is denied opportunities for economic, social and human development. On the other hand, no awareness is raised in the non-disabled population about the needs and existence of the disabled one, if this individual is not included in social, economic or political activities, or involved in the decision-making process for activities not necessarily related to disability.

Disability and Developing Societies

When crossing boundaries these programs must address belief systems indigenous to the targeted developing countries, and be aware of misjudgments due to culturally-racist assumptions or statements (Sheldon, 2005). By involving source and target societies, this process must be considered in a global context (Sheldon, 2005). Mentorship programs which are implemented successfully in more economically developed societies can and should disseminate the concept that disability is a social issue and while reaching across boundaries, project a social-model view of disabilities into a global context, to developing societies. As mentioned, mentorship programs achieve these through social network expansion and information availability as part of their education outreach programs. It is necessary for mentorship programs, regardless of the political or economic repercussions when crossing boundaries, to understand that education is a critical social issue and include it in their agendas. As Nelson Mandela said, “education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Currently there are already programs for labor-skills education implemented in developing countries (Groce, 2004) by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) of western origin (Sheldon, 2005). In Barbados and Cambodia, programs were implemented for young individuals with disabilities, to teach them job skills, providing not only job-specific vocational training (Kett, 2012) but also social interaction training (Groce, 2004). To ease their penetration when crossing boundaries, mentorship programs can learn from these local implementations about outreach mechanisms, networking, and social/cultural biases. In other words, mentorship programs formulated and implemented in more economically developed countries expand into developing societies by following guidelines and processes established by local grass-root programs and by understanding local stereotypes. As an example, the prejudice that individuals with disabilities must be hidden (Sheldon, 2005) can make implementing social programs in developing countries for youth with disabilities more difficult.

Developing a Cross-National Mentorship Program

Cultural Considerations

Social stereotyping revolves around differences in gender, race, culture, and social status. These social expressions can be barriers to the development of a mentorship program. Besides the definitions or aspects of disability mentioned in the section in this article, “Mentoring and Disability,” the UNICEF (2007) also states that disability is a condition in which physical or social barriers affect an individual in such a way that he or she cannot take part in community life. A mentorship program must develop within an environment that considers these barriers or differences not as challenges, but as opportunities to acknowledge and elaborate on the differences between mentors and protégés. In this context, it is especially important to consider that the members’ self image and their success with relationships are polarized by two distinct concepts: race and ethnicity (Darling et al., 2006). But when crossing boundaries physical barriers are not just uncovered by disability but also by the individual's social and cultural background, which might translate then into additional barriers. As Hill, Song, and West (2009) establish, through their research on Web Learning Environments, the cultural, gender and ethnic differences of mentors and protégés alike impact the student's learning experience and the way they interact with peers, friends and family members. Differences which Darling et al. (2006) indicate, can have profound effects on the fit of protégés in mentoring programs.

To develop a mentorship program across national boundaries the cultural contexts and individual's cultural perspectives must be considered, for example those defined by different world-views, such as collectivism and individualism. Darling et al. (2006) established that cultures which embrace collectivism, such as Asian, Latino and African, prefer mentorship programs that focus on in-group mentoring, either with multiple mentors and/or protégés, whereas European American youth value one-to-one relationships.

Besides the cultural differences, mentorship programs must also acknowledge differences in gender. It is essential to keep in mind that both boys and girls have two distinct social identities (Darling et al., 2006), and this difference determines how youth relate with others and with themselves. For example, girls’ relationships are characterized by more emotional closeness, especially during adolescence, so girls are more likely than boys to anchor their relationships in emotional connections. This difference defines the psychosocial, the individual’s psychological development in and with his or her social context, and the outcome of the mentoring relationship (see Rivas-Drake et al. (2014) for more about psychosocial effects on adolescent development). Gender shapes interpersonal relationships, and also when it combines with the individual's racial and ethnic identities it positively correlates with self-esteem and self concepts (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). This is true particularly in peer-to-peer relationships, in which the adolescents are empowered as they see themselves as role models (Burgstahler & Cronheim, 2001).

As is true for other social dimensions, disability alters gender expectations (McDonald et al., 2005); or, as Filmer (2008) concludes, disability interacts with both economical and social characteristics. Social expectations and stereotypes, such as those around gender, undermine the individual's identity and his/her relationships. For men, disability detracts from reaching the definition of masculinity, and for women, disability interferes with their fit in that of femininity (McDonald et al., 2007). For example, female protégés are at a higher risk of discrimination (Groce, 2004), therefore a mentorship program must try to align the mentor-protégé goals with their social identities, considering girls and boys may need different types of relationships (Darling et al., 2006).

Nevertheless, and as Acomb (2013) argues, a mentorship program must seek to surpass both physical and social barriers instead of just trying to avoid them. He also suggests that a successful program must develop a wide network of mentors, across gender, race, culture, and physical differences in order to address each individual's identity issues. Besides the benefit of finding identity similarities through individual's classification variety, exposing protégés to varied mentor-protégé or a peer-to-peer networks, may also help dismantle some stereotypes and myths, for instance, that the experience of disability is easier for the opposite gender (McDonald, Balcazar & Keys, 2007).

Therefore mentorship programs designed to function across nations will manage groups of mentors and protégés, both with and without disabilities that have different social and cultural backgrounds. Then, these programs must establish a broad cross-cultural framework that targets a varied population while it evaluates them through different social and cultural expectations, eventually enforcing rights to education, employment and social participation of young people with disabilities in their society (Groce, 2004).

Computer-Based Communication (CMC)

Computer mediated mentorship programs, or e-mentoring, are traditional mentorship programs, as those described above, that express and maintain the relationships of mentors and protégés through computer based technologies, primarily electronic mailing, instant messaging, and computer conferencing. Therefore they are also referred to as computer mediated communication (CMC) programs (Bierema & Merriam, 2002). Scholars such as Burgstahler (1997), Burgstahler and Cronheim (2001), Bierema and Merriam (2002) and Kim and Bonk (2006), believe that e-mentoring can enhance the mentoring process especially when targeting youth with disabilities, but research in this area is still sparse. The rationale of this approach to mentoring, is clarified by Burgstahler and Crawford (2007) who conclude that computer mediated communications may ease social isolation by generating peer and mentor networks that offer similar friendship ties and development as face-to-face relationships, and by affecting positively the self-esteem of adolescents with disabilities. This also empowers these individuals as it builds their computer skills and promotes the exchange of information.

In order to surpass the social and physical barriers existing for individuals with disabilities in their environments, computer-based mentorship programs can embrace some of the following five qualities: establish vertical and horizontal communication channels, establish a wide range of available and interconnected social resources, focus on computer skill development, embrace computer based communication, and establish transition support mechanisms.

First, develop and make available one-to-one, peer-to-peer, and in-group relationships, accommodating individualistic or collectivistic social perspectives. Second, define a wider social resources network for the protégé, providing a connection with more mentors and peer protégés to choose from, connecting them through one-to-one messaging, electronic mailing avenues, peer-to-peer conferencing, or forum-like applications. This is fundamental, as Acomb (2013) argued, for developing cross-gender/cross-racial relationships.

Third, focus on computer skill development, which by itself not only enhances the protégés working capabilities, but in some cases also helps overcome physical barriers by “minimizing distances” between mentors and protégés. The communication gaps can be reduced by not requiring the individuals' mobilization), or by suppressing the need for individuals with disabilities to require human interpreters to communicate by providing access to software readers, translators or magnifiers. This will enhance communication, as this adolescent with disabilities with access to similar technologies states. “I like electronic communication because I don't need an interpreter on the Internet or my TTY” (Burgstahler, 1997, p. 7), he says, adding, “This type of communication kinda hides what type of disability you got” (Burgstahler, 1997, p. 7).

Fourth, simplify communication by embracing computer mediated communications, and subsequently acknowledging that text-based computer-mediated communication can alleviate social inhibitions (Smith, Scielzo, Yarbrough & Rosopa, 2006) by positively affecting communications and boosting adolescent's with disabilities self-esteem (Burgstahler & Cronheim, 2001). Computer mediated communication can be easily supervised by the mentors to mitigate issues as those pointed out by Kim and Bonk (2006) and Smith (2006). Additionally, they argue that one of the disadvantages of a completely electronic means of communication is the lack of emotional meaning and social cues attributed to gender and/or status or any other type of non-verbal cues. This is something mentors must pay attention to because as it makes communication more transparent, but it also may allow misunderstandings.

And lastly, computer-based mentorship programs provide support to protégés through the adolescent transitions, just as regular organizational mentorship programs provide protégés with greater connectivity during their movement through three expatriate stages: departure, expatriation, and repatriation (Mezias & Scandura, 2005). This motion is similar to what an adolescent may experience during development transitions such as from college to work, or when gaining social independence.

Using Existing E-mentoring Communities for Protégés with Disabilities

DOIT is a university based e-mentorship national program for individuals with disabilities (Burgstahler & Crawford, 2007). It successfully enforces the five qualities listed in the previous section of the article by using and providing access to assistive technology (Carlson & Ehrlich, 2005). It combines in-person mentoring with computer based relationships (Bierema & Merriam, 2002), by creating a social network fueled by vertical and horizontal relationships, such as one-on-one, or one-to-many, or many-to-many hierarchies and peer collaborations (Stumbo et al., 2010). DOIT performs an effective outreach to individuals with disabilities, and is a source of information on disability dissemination (Burgstahler & Cronheim, 2001).

If it were to cross boundaries, this program could reuse its current mentor team to connect with protégés in developing countries, thus exposing its mentors and reducing some the costs of trying to implement an e-mentoring program targeted to youth with disabilities in a developing country. This would help to avoid additional costs because resources and accessibility are more limited in these areas (Filmer, 2008). Because it embraces computer-based communication, it can foster the spread and local growth of mentoring programs as it inspires the local development of in-person mentoring relationships in developing societies. By extending their mentor coverage and implementing computer-mediated communications these programs can not only connect mentors in one country with protégés in another, but also promote mentor cross-training as well as information exchange and dissemination (Stumbo et al., 2010). By incorporating these elements in its agenda, the mentoring program is actively re-shaping their mentors as it embraces new cultures, and establishes computer connections with youth with disabilities, by leveraging online technologies (Singh, 2010), and becoming “boundaryless”. After stating these and considering arguments from scholars such as Bierema and Merriam (2002), Stumbo et al. (2010) and Burgstahler and Cronheim (2001) in this topic, I argue that DOIT exemplifies a reasonable program to move across boundaries.

Mentoring Across National Boundaries

By extending a well-defined e-mentorship program to developing societies, we can ease social isolation and foster the development of academic, work-related and social skills (Kett, 2012). E-mentorship programs already have surpassed one boundary - a fixed location. An e-mentorship program may connect mentors and protégés regardless of their physical location by means of computer networks, making them a good channel to expand a mentorship program across national boundaries.

Burgstahler and Crawford (2007) argue that once a mentor-protégé connection is established, e-mentoring is an appealing option for a mentoring program, as it can translate and maintain this connection or communication despite many accessibility issues that may arise. The lack of connectivity is the main barrier I see for promoting this expansion to developing countries. However, the cost and feasibility issues associated to this can be solved by the leveraging of local developing community based initiatives like: the Projimo project in Mexico,

or the KAMPI organization in the Philippines, which combine local support programs with international funding (UNICEF, 2007). Although these programs are intended for the production of low-cost aids (like low-cost wheelchairs) in developing countries to address mobility issues, we can target programs such as the One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) initiative, to develop a low-cost computer network, and provide young protégés the access to computers required to establish an e-mentoring program. The OLPC project generates laptops designed for youth in developing countries at a cost of \$199 USD (for more information on this initiative go to <http://laptop.org/en/laptop/>).

Today social service non profits rely mostly on traditional sources of funding, donations and grants that may not be appropriate to address these costs for resources to build computer networks with the expansion of mentorship programs (Dees, 1998). An alternative is to target more self-sustaining funding, relying on the youth with disabilities families' income (Park, Turnbull & Turnbull , 2002). They can accomplish this by also incorporating volunteer work, adaptive equipment supplier discounts (Dees, 1998), and micro loan operations, as those described by Mersland (2005). These will create funding for the programs allowing protégés with disabilities in developing countries to reach their mentors.

The role of translating the rights stated by the United Nation's Conventions into practice is a responsibility of the countries ratifying the Convention. These can be accomplished in the developing societies by following a combined approach for establishing a mentoring program. First, they should leverage resources from mentoring organizations in more economically developed countries, and second perform the implementation and reap the benefits for protégés in developing countries. As Kett (2012) states, these programs must be enforced in the target society by the local government, service providers, private sector, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). For example, in countries like Kenya, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, and China, in which, despite their current social and economic development progress gaining momentum, their social policies on disability are still being developed. Nonetheless the governments and other parties have redefined federal laws and policies to accommodate citizens with disabilities (Kett, 2012). Changes have led to the development of programs such as the 'Livelihood Opportunities for Disabled Youth' in Kenya, a welfare support program targeted to families of individuals with disabilities, and skill training for adolescents (Kett, 2012).

Conclusions

Other ongoing initiatives, like the Y-Care International (the international arm of the Young Men's Christian Association [YMCA]) actually set a program's definitions in one country or context and implementation in another (Kett, 2012). Its success suggests that this model can be applied for expanding mentorship programs across boundaries. Of course there are still constraints facing protégés with disabilities in developing countries, but relocating and subsequently implementing programs, like mentorship ones, can be an effective means to implement initiatives to improve their quality of life.

Some of the ideas discussed in this article, such as computer mediated communications, the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, and developing societies' cultural, social and economic makeup, structure guidelines for developing e-mentoring across national boundaries. The implementation strategy can be outlined and prioritized as follows:

1. Find a successful mentoring program in an economically developed country, ideally one that has an e-mentoring or wants to deploy it.
2. Choose a developing country with a youth-with-disabilities population that can access the Internet.
3. Define an appropriate financial strategy to establish a viable computer network between mentors and protégés or supply the selected group of protégés with laptops (like with the OLPC program) that can connect to the Internet. Choose a foundation or institution focused on youth with disabilities in the developing country to gather the protégé team.
4. Pair mentors from one country with protégés from the other.
5. Train the protégés on the concept of peer-to-peer mentoring and the use CMC technologies and of the e-mentoring program.
6. Launch the program, monitoring the progress with regular group meetings of protégés and mentors.
7. Use these meetings to educate and reduce cultural/social barriers.

By bridging countries, or ignoring boundaries in the global context of disability, not-for-profit organizations, such as those mentioned before, leverage resources from more economically developed societies for use by individuals with disabilities in developing societies to achieve the social goals defined by global entities like the United Nations. Mentoring organizations can learn from this, and by following these steps and ultimately pairing individuals across countries ratify Sign's (2010) precept that we work better together.

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Endnotes

¹ Here on identified also as protégés

² The United Nations defined “youth” as individuals between the ages of 19 and 24