ONLINE MENTORING TO ENRICH THE LEARNING PROCESS

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BACKGROUND AND GOALS OF THE ONLINE MENTOR PROJECT

- The growing demand for
  - flexible, contextual, authentic ways to tutor, study and learn
  - links and networks between higher education and working life
  - qualified and shared expertise

- The goals of the Online Mentor project
  - to develop a leverage model with working life orientation, for online tutoring and learning purposes
  - to strengthen the aspect of working life in higher education
  - to improve and intensify online tutoring
  - to enhance the level of collaborative learning
THE STAGES OF THE PROJECT

   - 12 online mentors (working life experts) will be recruited to the 10 courses in AVERKO, the Open Polytechnic Learning Network

   - Online mentors are trained (1 credit) to share their working life expertise on an online course that corresponds to their expert knowledge

   - Online mentor will function on 2 to 4 online courses during a year as a work partner with the tutor in a competence area which has been negotiated, for example, in online discussions and/or as giving feedback and working as a tutor in some of the learning tasks

   - Online pedagogical research will be conducted on the project

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

- Funding
  - European Social Fund (ESF)
  - The State Provincial Office of Southern Finland
  - Central Ostrobothnia Polytechnic

- Administration
  - Central Ostrobothnia Polytechnic / AVERKO, Open Polytechnic Learning Network
    - AVERKO offers open polytechnic online courses to everyone regardless of previous education
    - AVERKO courses start four times a year and the course offerings include over 40 courses, ca.150 points (=100 credits)

- Duration
  - The project is to be conducted in 2004-2005
ONLINE MENTORS ON AVERKO’S COURSES

- Setting Up a New Business and Planning Business Activities (3 points) Minna Paananen & Sanna Skog/Pedrina’s Restaurant, Entrepreneurs

- Professional Growth (1 points) Sirkka Liisa Lokasaari/City of Kokkola, Work Supervisor

- Basics of Social Work for Intoxicant Abusers (5 points) Juha Pekola/ Ventuskartano ry - intoxicant rehabilitation unit, Project Manager

- Multicultural Issues (3 points) Pirkko Kivistö/Immigrant Office/City of Kokkola, Refugee Counsellor

- Multicultural Issues in the Field of Social and Health Care (3 + 1 credits) Pian Ahonen/Central Ostrobothnia Central Hospital, gynaecology ja maternity ward, Midwife

- Logistics (5 points) FINLAND POST/Jouni Männistö, Area Manager

- Marketing Services (3 points) Keijo Särkijärvi/Advertising and marketing Agency Heinäkuu, Entrepreneur

- Electronic Commerce (8 points) Timo Ylikangas & Vesa Pöyhönen/ RegWeb/Zonarius Oy, Managing Director, System Designer

- Quality Management (8 points) Jukka Pajula, Quality Manager

- Health and Safety at Work (1 points) Eija Alatalo/Työplus/Joint Municipal Board of the Health Centre of Kokkola Region/Occupational Health Nurse
PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE PROJECT

- Shared expertise with the interaction of higher education and working life
  - Using local experts and expert organisations as sources of information and as learning partners → learning networks → sharing of knowledge
  - Collaborative effort of teachers, students and representatives of the working life → the fundament for multidisciplinary and multi-domain study and for networking

- New concept of learning and tutoring, the focus being on contextuality, problem orientation, authenticity and meaningfulness
AGENTS OF THE ONLINE COURSE IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE PROJECT
- **Research questions**
  - How do the online mentors experience their action?
  - How do the tutors experience the online mentors as their new partners in the online course?
  - How do the students experience online mentoring?
    - How do the students experience the sharing of expertise and the collaborative learning process in the online mentoring model?

- **Research methodology**
  - Action research
  - Method triangulation
    - qualitative and quantitative data gathering methods and analysis
- **Research data**
  - “web tracks” from 30 online courses
  - interviews of 12 online mentors
  - survey data: 10 to 15 teachers
  - survey data: 600 students taking part in the online courses where online mentoring model was applied
  - online mentors’ journals
  - observation during the process, discussion memos, and feedback data
  → Resulting in several research reports, research articles and conference papers
  → In the following, initial findings of online mentor activities in seven online courses.
INITIAL VIEWS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ONLINE MENTORS

- **Mentoring as a valuable learning experience**
  - The role of working life expert was considered as rewarding and mentoring was also seen to advance networking.

- **Mentoring as an investment in the professional development**
  - The interactions and discussions with students and tutors supported the online mentors in reflecting and updating their knowledge and in enhancing their professional competence and growth.

- **Mentoring as a target of development**
  - The online mentors were also active in developing the online education and online mentoring model further
  - More attention must be placed on committing the online mentors on their task and on highlighting the significance of time management (skills).

→ The need for ”lighter mentoring model”, the online mentor available for one or two weeks in a special online mentor forum
INITIAL VIEWS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TUTORS

- Mentoring as an efficient way to complement the know-how of tutors
  - The tutors perceived the online mentor as useful and valuable partners.
  - While the online mentors shared their experiential knowledge, they also brought new ideas to tutors on how to develop their teaching profession and tutoring practices.
  - Because of the online mentors’ input, the tutors could focus more on giving a personal feedback and on managing the course overall while the online mentors took part in the discussions.

- Mentoring as a development tool for course modification and content production
  - The tutors got a relevant feedback of the course content from the perspective of working life and were thus able to develop it further.

- Mentoring as a way to share the responsibility of guidance
  - The online mentors complemented the support of tutors. The roles and duties of online mentors and tutors, however, must be clarified accurately.
INITIAL VIEWS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF STUDENTS

- Mentoring as a source of motivation
  - A chance to study and work with the real working-life professionals increased the students’ interest in achieving the learning goals → the motivating impact of online mentoring

- Mentoring as an enriching element in the online course
  - Through online mentoring, the students were able to get new contacts and networks with skilled professionals and working life experts
  - Online mentoring activated and enriched the interactions in the course.

- Mentoring as a confusing experience
  - Using online mentors and tutors at the same time confused some of the students.
  - Some of the students had difficulties to separate the roles of the online mentors and tutors and to utilize the potential of mentoring.
PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

- Preliminary researcher findings indicate that online mentoring
  - is seen as interesting and necessary feature of today’s culture of education; it attracts students, tutors and mentors
  - offers a meaningful way to share the expertise; it facilitates meaningful learning and effective tutoring
  - allows a higher number of real working life problems and experiences as well as new ways of thinking or doing to be built in online education
  - requires a high level of commitment by all involved parties to make it work
  - must be designed and organised in a pedagogically meaningful way
  - must fit into the structure of online course in order to be meaningful → the need for interactive and collaborative elements
REFERENCES (1/2)


REFERENCES (2/2)

- Syrjälä, H. (1999). *Verkko-opetustaavoimessa verkostoammatitikorkeakouluussa. AVERKOn tutoropettajien kokemuksia tietoverkkoväylän hyödyntävästä opetuksesta (Online teaching in open polytechnical learning network. AVERKO’s tutor teachers’ experiences in teaching that utilises information networks)*. Research handout. COP/AYERKOC.