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Professional Development: 21st Century Models

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Never before has the pressure been so high to find ways to support successful teaching and learning through effective professional development. With the U.S. education community, driven by No Child Left Behind, focusing on standards, accountability, and pledges to see that every child is taught by a certified and qualified teacher, the National Staff Development Council has proposed an additional goal: That all teachers in all schools should experience high-quality professional learning by 2007.

In its January 2003 report, *No Dream Denied: A Pledge to America's Children*, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future contends that, contrary to popular belief, the main challenge facing schools in their quest for qualified teachers is not recruiting, but retention.

And the key to retaining good teachers, according to NCTAF, is—you guessed it—effective professional development. "We have concluded that the nation cannot achieve quality teaching for every child unless those teachers can be kept in the classroom," say the report's authors. "The missing ingredient is finding a way for school systems to organize the work of qualified teachers so they can collaborate with their colleagues in developing strong learning communities that will sustain them as they become more accomplished teachers."

What do successful professional development communities look like? And what role does technology play in supporting them? To answer these questions we interviewed several education leaders from forward-thinking, technology-savvy schools and organizations. Here's what we learned.

Workshops That Focus on Real Needs...

Face-to-face presentations, some of them including hands-on lab sessions, are still at the core of most professional development programs involving technology. However, in recent years these professional development offerings have evolved in several key ways.

According to Sheryl Abshire, district administrative coordinator of technology for the Calcasieu Parish Public Schools in Lake Charles, La., "Professional development used to be all about the 'how to' of technology, but we've moved beyond that. The focus now is on instructional strategies and needs. How do you use technology to improve student achievement? What does it look like to teach a standards-based lesson infused with technology? Only when teachers see the impact on elevating student learning do they 'buy in' and integrate the technology-enhanced teaching strategies into their classroom practices."

Topics for key staff development sessions in Calcasieu Parish, therefore, center on academic goals. This year the district will focus much of its professional development efforts on the fourth grade and on middle and high school math. Two other groups of teachers will be the target audience next year, in a rotation that has each group receiving focused support one year out of four. In addition, site-based teams play a big role in determining professional development needs for their own school building.

...And Real Uses of Technology

This is not to say that schools in Lake Charles or elsewhere have turned away from "how to" instruction altogether. If you look at course catalogs for summer technology workshops in Calcasieu Parish or in the Richmond Community Schools in Richmond, Ind., for example, you will find plenty of sessions introducing teachers to new software programs or helping them brush up on their spreadsheet skills or video editing techniques. These learning experiences are still in high demand, but there's a new twist: An increasing number of districts now offer such lessons in a "just in time" fashion—frequently with help from technology.

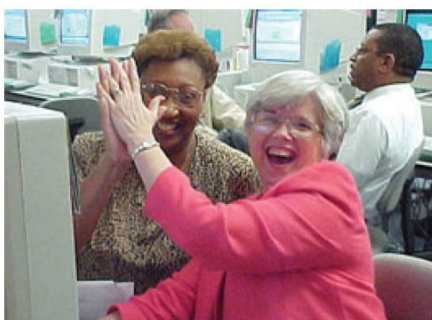
Don't Forget the Administrators

Well-trained leaders are key to the success of any staff development effort.

It is easy to think of professional development as training for teachers. But in a growing number of states and districts attention has shifted to supporting and teaching principals and other school administrators.

Read the full version [here](#).

Sometimes the technology used is as simple as a PowerPoint presentation or a PDF file with textual instructions and diagrams. In Richmond, however, a new technology tool—one customized for the district by Sonic Foundry, the maker of Mediasite Live—is helping professional development instructors turn live presentations into online multimedia workshops for just-in-time learning.



Richmond's WebCast Academy grew out of concerns about scheduling and release-time problems that made it difficult for teachers to attend workshops at times convenient to them. Since January 2003, the district has been offering its most popular presentations in a lab where the voice and computer displays are recorded digitally. Usually, the sessions are live, with some audience members in the lab and others at remote sites from where they can submit questions via e-mail or use polling software to respond to queries sent by the instructor to their computer screens. Afterward, the session, along with optional extras such as classroom video footage, serves as raw material for the WebCast Academy version of the class.

Increasingly, school administrators are being targeted in technology-based professional development initiatives. Here, two elementary school principals celebrate completing a "Laptops for Leaders" course, which the Calcasieu Parish Public Schools provides for all of its principals.

According to staff development coordinator Valerie Biggs, the creation process can be time consuming.

"We are lucky to have great technical staff to help out, because it really requires two people—the instructor and a technician who sets up the technology, manages the recording, and then publishes the presentation to the Web afterwards. However, once it's done it's a great resource that can be used over and over. And I've resolved never again to cancel an important workshop because of low enrollment due to scheduling problems."

At Houston County High School in Warner Robins, Ga., software from Tegrity plays a similar role. According to principal Mike Hall, the school's two Tegrity systems are used to tape lessons for a variety of purposes, including access for students who are hospitalized or ill. "We can tape a PowerPoint presentation or something that the teacher is doing at the board and post the presentation on the Web in streaming video, with the teacher talking in a small window while the display is shown on the larger screen. Staff development is another important use. When we implement new software, we can tape the live session and post it to the Web so teachers can go in and review the training whenever they wish."

Learning That Is Sustained and Collegial

Perhaps the biggest thing that has changed about technology-related professional development over the years is the recognition that it needs to be ongoing. In fact, federal No Child Left Behind funds earmarked for professional development come with a stipulation: they cannot be used for one-day or short-term learning experiences.

Monica Beglau, instructional program leader for Missouri's statewide eMINTS (Enhancing Missouri's Instructional Networked Teaching Strategies) program, agrees strongly with the need for sustained professional development. "Our research has shown that sessions must be followed up with regular classroom visits to provide support and mentoring," she says. The classroom visits help teachers translate what they learn in professional development sessions into actual classroom practice; this is the piece that is usually missing in most professional development programs." First-year teachers in the two-year eMINTS program receive four release days and 100 hours of mentoring and instruction. Second-year teachers get two release days and 75 hours.

According to experts, another key element of sustained professional development is teamwork. In the Summer 2003 issue of the *Journal of Staff Development*, Stephanie Hirsh writes, "To meet [the NSDC goal of having all teachers experience high-quality professional learning by the year 2007], every teacher must be a part of a learning team—a team of teachers who meet almost every day about practical ways to improve teaching and learning."

This is the approach taken at Montefiore School, a special education school in



Read the full version [here](#).

Can We Afford It?

Find some creative solutions to offering high-quality staff development during a budget crunch.

Everybody knows that initiatives and technology tools such as the ones described in "Professional Development: 21st Century Models" cost money. In spite of growing evidence that effective professional development is essential to school improvement, tight budgets in many states threaten to undo much of the progress that has been made in this arena.

Chicago, where teams of teachers and learning specialists meet at least once a week to plan curriculum and discuss individual students. Each team consists of approximately nine faculty members, including two technology integration specialists who support the other teachers in their daily use of technology.

Says Eileen Gallagher, who heads up Montefiore's professional development program, "You must have a team to design, implement, and follow up on professional development. It cannot be a one-person job. It is essential to provide opportunities for ongoing training and teacher collaboration."



Read the full version [here](#).

eMINTS Cluster Instructional Specialists are professional development experts who work with teachers in their classrooms to help them translate lengthy instruction hours into practice.

Building Online Communities

Technology can be an important tool to help with collegiality and sustained learning. As the NCTAF authors of *No Dream Denied* put it, "Technology is perhaps the most important-and most underutilized-tool for providing teachers access to the targeted professional development they need, when and how they need it. Online courses, informal support groups, and other network-supported resources open the door to professional development opportunities far beyond what any school or district might be able to offer."

In many school districts across the country, virtual course delivery systems are used for both online instruction and ongoing collaboration among teachers. In Calcasieu Parish, for example, a number of face-to-face professional development activities are supplemented with follow-up discussions and lesson sharing using Blackboard.

Technology & Learning contributing editor Kim Carter is a fan of the online community Tapped In for ongoing professional development. "Some people use it for meetings," she explains, "especially when they work with people from different geographical locations. I've used it to hold a virtual class discussion-clarifying conceptual understandings and having educators share their specific experiences and applications. You can post URLs for participants so they can see examples of what you're talking about. But quite honestly, what I use Tapped In for most frequently is keeping my own professional development going. I love the afternoon sessions and the opportunities to talk with other practitioners."

Carter also uses other technology tools to support the faculty at the community-based school she founded. They include Centrinity's FirstClass, with which teachers create and post electronic portfolios, and LiveText, used for collaborative instructional design work. (See the directory starting on page 40 for more on these and other tools.)

Although Monica Beglau is convinced that it would be difficult to offer all eMINTS professional development online-she believes that "most teachers need more assistance and actual in-classroom coaching before they can take off and learn on their own in an online environment"-she has some interesting stories to tell about online collaborations involving eMINTS teachers. Using an open source tool known as Shadow netWorkspace, a number of teachers collaborated recently to develop participatory instructional units that they then used with their students. One of these units, focusing on how to improve a heavily traveled local highway, caught the attention of the Missouri Department of Transportation, which was impressed by the advice it received from the eMINTS students.

Models and Mentors

Steve Phelps, who oversees professional development at St. Ignatius College Preparatory School in San Francisco, offers the following advice to staff developers: "Work with the strongest people first. Build their capacities. You only need about 20 percent to 25 percent of a faculty to make a change." Starting with the most energetic, enthusiastic, early adopters and allowing them to inspire others is a popular strategy today. The eMINTS program, with participating schools selected through a competitive application process, is based on this approach.

A similar approach is taken in Calcasieu Parish, where specially selected "I-TEC" classrooms serve as models for other teachers and schools. Even in districts and states where no funding is available for model classrooms, many professional development programs rely heavily on identifying internal experts and leaders to serve as mentors to others.

In some cases, the mentors are students rather than adult teachers or administrators. This approach is strongly advocated by Dennis Harper of Generation Yes, which trains students to support technology in their schools: "Our philosophy is that if the K-12 students are not involved in the reform process, little will happen. After all, kids make up 92 percent of the school population

and have lots of energy and technology expertise." In the Gen Y model, one teacher in the school teaches a group of students to mentor and support the remaining teaching staff. Teachers spend an average of three hours per semester working with their certified Gen Y student, who then provides in-classroom support and training for teachers.

A number of the online professional development programs described in the included [directory](#) have a mentoring component to them. One of the newest programs of this sort is My eCoach, developed by a team headed by *Technology & Learning* author Barbara Bray. This new resource is based on a "coach the mentors" approach, in which teachers collaborate online to develop inquiry-based units and curriculum tools supported by virtual coaches who are, themselves, mentored by the My eCoach team.

As T&L contributing editor David Warlick puts it, "I believe the best professional development is that which happens casually as teachers share with teachers what they are learning on an ongoing basis. I am very excited about the My eCoach approach in which coaches have access to their team members' work and can give tips, point them to tutorials, pat them on their virtual shoulders, and actually pay a visit when necessary. The outcomes are rich projects with assessment tools, interactive and collaborative work spaces, and many other resources that may be published for other teachers to clone for their own students."

Learning from Case Studies

Another collegial approach that focuses on mentorship and best practices is the type of "lesson study" used effectively for professional development in Japan. The lesson study process, popularized in this country by James W. Stigler and James Hiebert, involves extended observations of individual lessons by groups of educators who then meet to analyze the approaches and outcomes observed.

Lesson study and other sorts of best-practice observations benefit greatly from videotaping and viewing. Increasingly the video is digital and finding its way onto the World Wide Web.

A prototype for this approach was developed in 1999 by researchers at the University of California, Irvine, in collaboration with the Orange County Department of Education, Apple Computer, and several other universities and colleges. Located online at www.gse.uci.edu/cli, the project features videos of exemplary teachers involved in standards-based math instruction, accompanied by commentary that helps practicing and preservice educators understand the reasoning behind each lesson. According to UCI's Joan Bissell, the site has been used "on an experimental basis in preparing new teachers. Preliminary research shows positive impacts of experience with the California Learning Interchange video cases on the teachers' ability to teach mathematical concepts in the elementary grades."



A high school student mentors an elementary student during the Summer Technology Camp at the Technology Training Center in Calcasieu Parish, La.

Commercial producers such as Lesson Lab and eSchool Online are also currently making headway in this area, offering a growing database of streaming video case studies that educators can view and listen to online. At the Lesson Lab Web site, the process is described as follows: "Video and other artifacts of practice . . . enable teachers and other professionals to study both their own and others' practice in context, slowed down. The tools also facilitate collaborative discussions of practice, both in live groups and virtually, over the Internet. The results of these activities are stored in scalable multimedia databases, which provide means of accumulating and sharing professional knowledge over time."

NEXT: [At-a-Glance](#)

[20 Tips for Effective Professional Development](#)

[Don't Forget the Administrators](#)

[Can We Afford It?](#)

[Tools for Building Online Professional Development Offerings](#)

[Tapping into Existing Online Professional Development Courses](#)

[Other Resources](#)



At Technology & Learning's own Web site, look for the following recently updated articles and resources focusing on professional development.

Educator's Outlook

[The Professional Development Page](#)

[PDQ \(Professional Development Quick Tips\)](#)

T&L Magazine Archives

[Online Course Building Tools, February 2002](#)

[Build and Teach a Successful online Course, April 2003](#)

[Trend Watch: Video Lessons From Abroad, May 2003](#)

[Are Your Teachers "Highly Qualified"? June 2003](#)

At-a-Glance

For a quick look at the three programs profiled in this article, go [here](#).

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Read other articles from the [August Issue](#)

Here's a look at the three programs profiled in this feature.

Richmond Community Schools

Richmond, Ind.

Scope

Thirteen schools, 6,000 students

Main components of this professional development program

- Live workshops and a "WebCast Academy" that allows educators to participate in the same workshops and presentations online at a time of their choosing.
- Teachers get six half-days of release time to attend workshops and have 24-hour access to WebCast Academy classes.
- Individual sites focus on goals of school improvement with help from full-time literacy consultants as well as on-site "tech consultants" — teachers who receive a small stipend to devote nine hours of non-release time yearly to helping colleagues with technology integration.
- Administrators and others are able to take graduate-level courses in cooperation with Indiana University and Ball State University via distance-learning labs located on Richmond Schools campuses.

Delivered by

In addition to a professional development coordinator for the district, there are two "teacher leaders" at the high school with half-time professional development responsibilities, one full-time teacher leader serving the two middle schools, and two full-time literacy consultants for the elementary schools. The district technology staff includes a director and assistant director of technology and seven full-time technicians.

Funding sources

A \$10 million technology bond covers the new equipment and some staffing. Additional funds come from the general fund and a technology grant.

Technology used

- Through bond money, all schools have new computers, fast Internet connections, "Smart Board" projectors, and a computer-to-student ratio of 6 to 1 or better. This equipment is used for teacher as well as student learning.
- WebCast Academy, a customized version of Sonic Foundry's Mediasite Live Web presentation system, is used to create online workshops that are similar to the face-to-face version.
- Videoconferencing and other distance-learning tools are now available through labs at central offices, high schools, and middle schools. Plans are in place to add distance-learning labs at the elementary schools next year.

Lessons learned

"The biggest lesson we've learned," says staff development coordinator Valerie Biggs, "is to start small and then constantly tweak the program. Our first [WebCast Academy] presentations were very rough, but you really stop and think about how you can