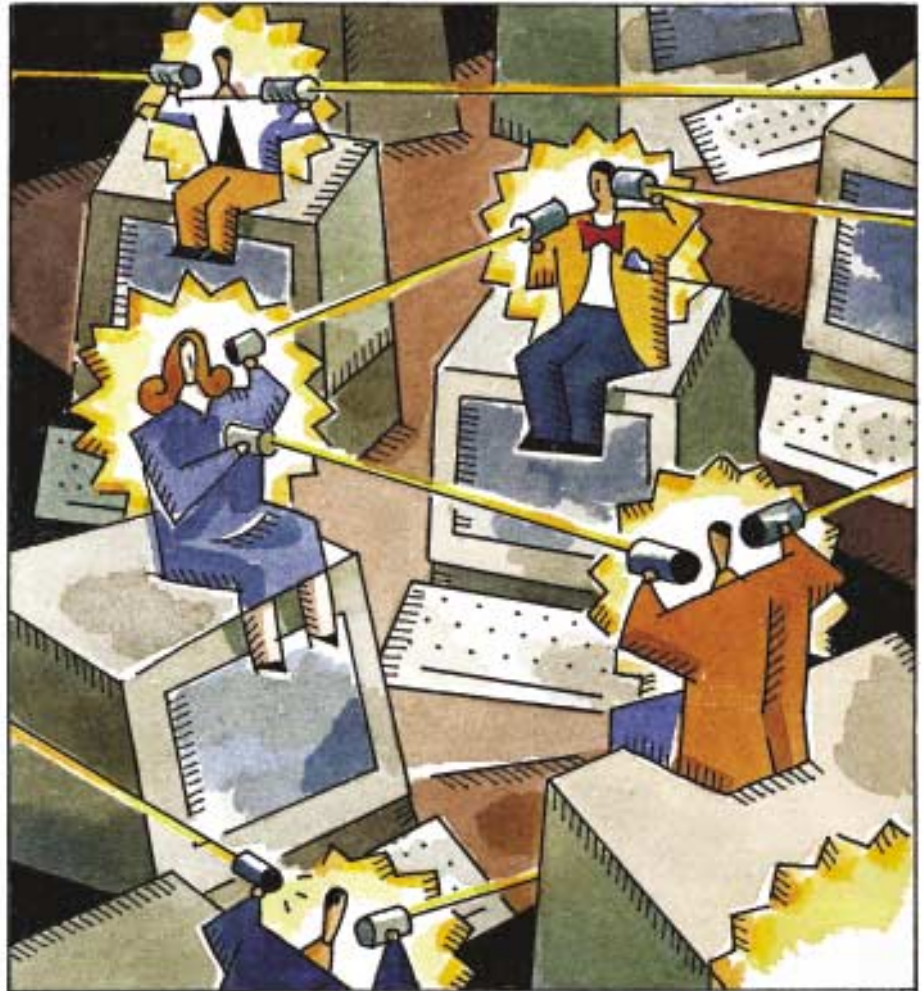


# Successful Online Professional Development

Using community-based train-the-trainers programs, EdTech Leaders Online is spreading online professional development throughout the United States and learning some valuable lessons along the way.



*By Barbara Treacy,  
Glenn Kleiman, and  
Kirsten Peterson*

**Subject:** Online professional development

**Audience:** Teachers, technology coordinators, library/media specialists

**Grade Level:** Teacher education

**Technology:** Internet/Web, distance learning software

**Standards:** NETS•A II ([www.iste.org/standards](http://www.iste.org/standards))

In January 2000, our team from the Center for Online Professional Education (COPE) at Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) launched EdTech Leaders Online, an online professional development (OPD) program to help school districts, state departments of education, regional service providers, and other educational organizations incorporate technology into their educational programs. During the past two years, we have built EdTech Leaders Online into

a national program, currently running in 17 states and the District of Columbia, with more than 50 school-based teams participating. Through this work, we have learned valuable lessons about how online learning can build capacity for technology integration and help school districts meet the challenge of providing effective professional development for teachers and administrators. We have also learned that vibrant, interactive communities of educators can be built online and have significant

effects on classroom teacher practice. We would like to share with you these and other key lessons from our experience. We begin with examples from school districts that, through their work with us, have built successful local OPD programs.

### Samples of Success

The America 2000 consortium, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), and Peabody Public Schools were among the first teams to participate in the EdTech Leaders Online Program. (*Editor's note:* For these programs' URLs and other Web addresses, see Resources at the end of this article.) Based at EDC, a nonprofit educational research and development organization, and supported in part by the AT&T Foundation, EdTech Leaders Online has helped these teams build successful local OPD programs and learned valuable lessons about how online learning can strengthen and support ongoing technology programs.

**America 2000.** As part of a Technology Innovation Challenge Grant, school leaders in the America 2000 consortium of five rural districts in northern Louisiana planned a comprehensive program of technology professional development. The geographic distance between the 24 schools made it difficult to get participants together for activities and for the technology specialists to travel to participating schools to provide ongoing support. The consortium discovered that OPD was a successful way to bridge both time and distance and increase the reach and effects of their program.

**Los Angeles Unified School District.** Across the country from rural Louisiana, LAUSD is the second largest school district in the country, consisting of 11 local districts. In LAUSD, the Training and Certification Unit is charged with training local district in-

structional technology support staff, who are spread throughout multiple districts located across Los Angeles. Like the Louisiana districts, LAUSD found that OPD provided an effective way to train their trainers and provide consistent technology professional development across the widespread district.

**Peabody Public Schools.** In the northeast part of the United States, Peabody, Massachusetts, is a small city north of Boston whose school department used a combination of state grants and local funds to make large investments in computer technology and infrastructure. They found, however, that they needed additional resources to provide ongoing technology professional development to help teachers and administrators learn to use this technology effectively and to develop a team of technology integration specialists. Peabody school administrators also found that online programs for technology professional development provided a cost-effective way to meet their program needs.

### A Model for Learning

OPD provides Web-based learning opportunities, including educational programs, courses, workshops, activities, resources, and online interactions with instructors, mentors, and colleagues. There are many different types of online learning, but the learning community model of OPD—which combines readings, activities, and facilitated, peer-to-peer collaborative discussions—is particularly suited to OPD for educators, and is the EdTech Leaders Online approach that forms the basis of this article.

In this model, participants access their course materials on the Web and complete a sequence of Web-based readings and activities during each course session. Activities may include

exploring a Web site or a computer-based simulation, experimenting with a new technology tool or piece of software, viewing an online video clip, or trying out a new technology-enhanced activity in the classroom and sharing the results with others. The focal point of the session is the online discussion, where learners participate asynchronously to share their reflections, ideas, comments, and questions in response to a focused discussion prompt posed by the facilitator. Because participants and facilitators are able to take time to prepare comments and responses, online discussions can be more reflective than synchronous discussions or face-to-face workshops, and provide all participants ample opportunity to contribute to the discussion. A record of each online discussion is kept automatically, so participants and facilitators can always review previous discussions to build on them in later discussions. This also contributes to the depth and inclusiveness made possible by the learning community model. See Benefits of OPD Programs on p. 46 for a description of potential benefits of these programs for educators.

### Teams of Learners

The EdTech Leaders Online program is a train-the-trainer, capacity-building program for teams of local participants from school districts, regional service providers, state departments of education, or teacher-training institutions. These teams are trained in semester-long online courses to facilitate online workshops, developed by EDC, on integrating technology into the curriculum (Technology Integration Program), or to develop their own online workshops for teachers or high school students (Online Course Design Program). Teams can range in size from a minimum of 3 participants from a single school or small district, trained in a cohort with 4–6 teams from other

educational organizations, to a full cohort of 24 participants from a single, large organization such as a big city, a consortium of school districts, a state department of education, or a university.

The EDC online workshops are project- and standards-based and include six sessions of one to two weeks. Some of the workshops are focused on specific grade levels and subject areas, such as *Using Technology to Support Literacy Development in Primary-Level Classrooms*, and others address the needs of teachers and administrators across grade levels and curricular areas, such as *Approaches and Tools for Developing Web-Enhanced Lessons*. See Figure 1 for an image of the sequence of sessions in the six-week online workshop, *Finding the Best Educational Resources on the Web*, run in fall 2001 for America 2000.

Participating teams, on their own schedules during the year following the training program, facilitate the EDC workshops or the workshops they have designed for teachers, administrators, or students in their schools or educational organizations. EDC works closely with each participating team to develop and manage their local online programs and provide ongoing support, in online specialist forums, to the trained facilitators and course developers. These national forums foster ongoing, collaborative communities of trained OPD specialists. One important lesson learned from this work is that OPD works best when it is integrated carefully into ongoing local programs and combined with face-to-face opportunities.

### Elements of Success

The success of your OPD program depends on fulfilling the following elements:

- Assess local professional development needs and develop an OPD plan based on these needs.
- Connect OPD with other ongoing, face-to-face professional development activities.

- Carefully select and train OPD-specialist team members.
- Build a strong local team.
- Develop incentives.
- Publicize the OPD program and involve local stakeholders.
- Provide readily available and reliable access to technology and support.
- Foster a rich, interactive online learning community.
- Integrate online workshops with face-to-face meetings.

**Assess local professional development needs and develop an OPD plan based on these needs.** Successful OPD programs must be grounded in the needs of the participating school district or educational organization. When beginning an OPD program, it is critical to look at the district or organization's overall technology and professional development plan to assess the particular needs the OPD program will serve and how the OPD program will connect to

other ongoing programs. In some cases, the planning process for the OPD program ultimately helped some districts refine their overall professional development plan and understand the role of OPD within it.

In the EdTech Leaders Online program, participating teams are trained in a cohort with teams from other school districts and states, which can help participants learn from the successful plans and strategies implemented in other areas. As Barbara Crenshaw from the Concordia Parish America 2000 team said, "Being able to communicate with other online participants in another part of the country and observe how their school districts are set up, as well as to view problems they are confronted with, has helped me to compare and evaluate my school district."

**Connect OPD with other ongoing face-to-face professional development activities.** It is important to connect the

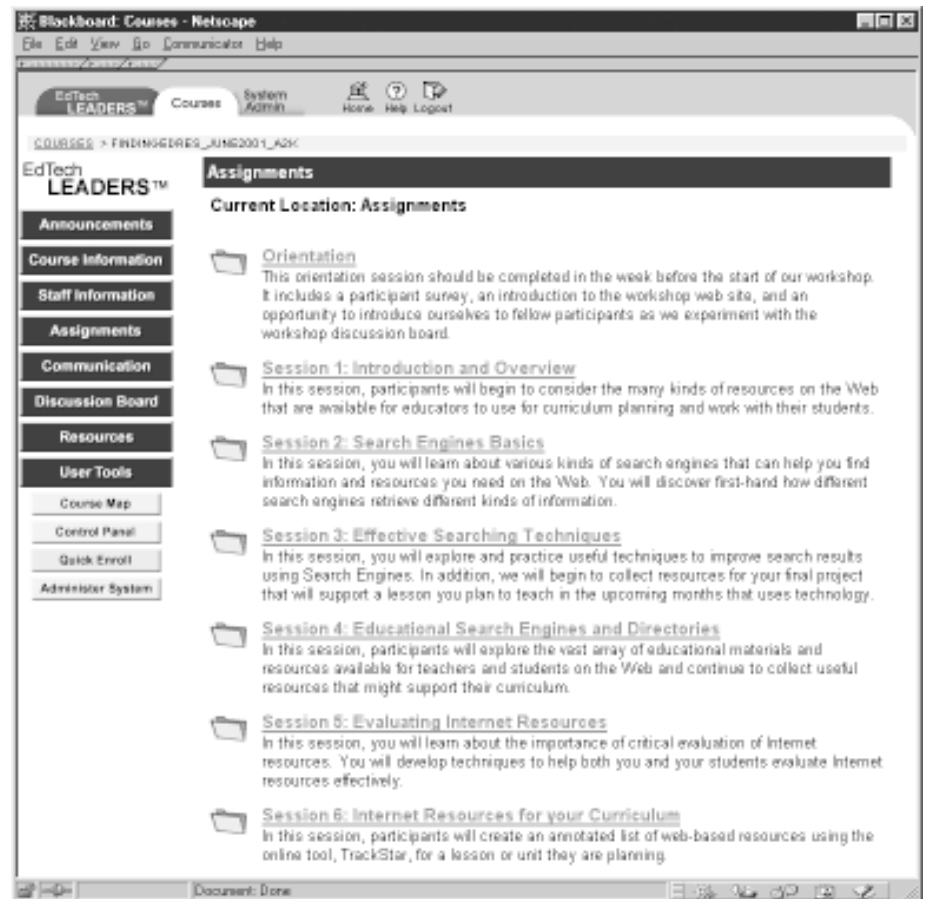


Figure 1. Sequence of sessions for the six-week workshop *Finding the Best Educational Resources on the Web*.

online learning program with the face-to-face professional development programs scheduled in the district. Planning this way can be more effective than if each district-based professional development activity is scheduled in isolation. For example, if a school district's online program has the goal of helping teachers learn to use the Web to develop project-based lessons, they could also plan an inservice day to supplement this training with a speaker or hands-on workshop.

In the America 2000 consortium, project teachers participated in an online workshop, Tools and Techniques to Develop Web-Enhanced Lessons, and produced final products: a set of Web-enhanced projects for use in their classrooms. A collection of the Web-enhanced lessons can be viewed online. The project director, Leinda Peterman, planned to follow up the series of online workshops by inviting Tom March, one of the developers of the WebQuest method of inquiry-based, Web-enhanced projects, to offer a face-to-face institute for project teachers. This coordinated planning between the online and face-to-face activities provided a coherent program for project participants. Examples of the Web-Quest lessons developed by project teachers at this face-to-face follow-up session can be viewed online.

**Carefully select and train OPD-specialist team members.** In building local capacity for OPD, the trained OPD specialists are able to bring an understanding of local curriculum, professional development programs, and policies, and can be readily accessible to online workshop participants. When selecting participants to be local OPD facilitators, it is important to consider the following criteria: experience in facilitating other professional development training, leadership skills, time availability, interest in technology and online learning, and content knowledge in a particular subject or grade-level

curriculum area. Successful OPD specialists can be teachers, technology coordinators, principals, professors, program administrators, library/media specialists, and others.

**Build a strong local team.** It is important for the team coordinator or program administrator to pay attention to building the cohesiveness of a local OPD specialist team. The team should stay connected to each other using online communication and, where possible, face-to-face meetings. Functioning as a cohesive unit is essential to the OPD team's success, as they need to coordinate OPD program activities such as selecting and scheduling the online workshop offerings, organizing face-to-face meetings for online workshop participants, addressing issues of online workshop facilitation, evaluating the effects of the online workshop, and involving administrators and other stakeholders in their work.

As Laurie Santos, LAUSD professional development staff member and team coordinator, said:

I conducted a planning meeting with our OPD Specialist team; we maintain constant communication. During our planning meeting, I distributed professional books, such as *The Learner's Guide to Distance Learning and Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace*, an informational sheet on "Netiquette," and other items I thought might be of use. We also planned for a debriefing meeting after all courses ended.

**Develop incentives.** Incentives for online workshop participation and facilitation can include monetary compensation; access to additional classroom hardware, software, or other materials; reduced teaching workloads or exemptions from other duties; continuing education points or graduate credit; and public recognition. Though

resources available to school districts for such incentives vary widely, providing some form of recognition for workshop participation can go a long way in sustaining the involvement and enthusiasm of participants.

**Publicize the OPD program and involve local stakeholders.** Attention must be paid to developing appropriate publicity about the online workshop program in order to recruit potential participants. It can also serve as a way to establish buy-in from important stakeholders. Many districts have created either print or online brochures or Web sites to publicize their programs. An example of an online brochure and online registration are available from the Louisiana Department of Education OPD team, as well as a print brochure from the Washington, D.C., Public Schools OPD team.

**Provide readily available and reliable access to technology and support.** It is important that participants in OPD have convenient access to a computer with a reliable Internet connection, ideally from both school and home. Without ready and reliable access, the major advantages of OPD—to provide anytime, anyplace access to a learning community—cannot occur. It is also important that the OPD programs have appropriate technical support available, both to help individuals with specific problems and to address any overall problems quickly. For example, we have had occasions when a newly installed district firewall interfered with participants' access to an online workshop. We needed district technical support staff to change some firewall settings to enable access—simple to do once the problem is identified as a districtwide problem.

**Foster a rich, interactive online learning community.** The online facilitator must understand the different pace of interaction in an online workshop and use specific strategies to build strong,

## Benefits of OPD Programs

**Increased access to meet individual learning goals:** OPD provides opportunities to participate in professional development activities that might not be available locally.

**Experience with the use of technology as a learner:** OPD does not require sophisticated technical knowledge; instead, it gives educators a chance to experience the power of technology while learning in a supportive environment. This is important to help educators consider how they might use technology with their own students and to feel comfortable introducing it into their own classrooms.

**Use of rich multimedia resources and new technologies:** The explosion of digital information and new media available on the Web offer abundant and engaging learning opportunities that can address different learning styles and needs.

**Anytime, anyplace learning:** Online learning enables busy educators to select personally convenient participation times. Additionally, OPD does not require costs such as class release time, space rental, travel, food, and on-site equipment needed for face-to-face technology workshops.

**Ability to meet special needs:** OPD provides a means for people with special needs to participate with adaptive technologies (e.g., text-to-speech for those with visual impairments) and for each participant to work at his or her own pace.

**Collaborative learning opportunities with other educators:** OPD provides a way for teachers to interact with colleagues and professionals across time and place and to become part of a global community of lifelong learners.

**Direct impact on classroom practice:** The ongoing and extended nature of OPD workshops enables them to include projects in which participants develop technology-enhanced lessons, try these lessons in their classrooms, and share the results in reflective discussions.

**New opportunities for follow-up:** OPD can extend learning beyond single in-service days and provide creative ways for participants to stay connected with colleagues after the end of a professional development workshop or activity.

discussion forum for “casual chat,” which enables participants to communicate about topics not directly related to the session content.

***Integrate online workshops with face-to-face meetings:*** One of the most important keys to a successful online workshop is understanding how and when to incorporate face-to-face workshop meetings. Although this is not always possible, and many online workshops work successfully when offered entirely online, it is important to know that one or more carefully planned face-to-face meetings can significantly strengthen the online learning experience.

Perhaps the most important face-to-face meeting to consider for an online workshop is an initial kick-off meeting for workshop participants. This can include other stakeholders such as building or district administrators, school board members, and other teachers curious about online learning. Ideally, this meeting would be held before the workshop begins and may serve some or all of the following purposes:

- introducing the online course environment
- practicing with the online discussion software
- building a learning community among the participants
- answering participant questions about online learning or course content

Other suggested face-to-face meetings include a mid-workshop meeting to maintain workshop momentum and a postcourse meeting and celebration, where participants share final products, strategies for classroom implementation, and examples of student work.

In the EdTech Leaders Online program, trained OPD specialists stay connected with EDC staff and other trained facilitators in a Facilitator Forum to share their strategies, questions, ideas, and reflections in an online community of their own, as they facilitate

collaborative online communities. The facilitator's task is to make everyone feel welcome and to create an open atmosphere for sharing and interaction. Facilitators should focus on keeping the discussion moving and on track, rather than trying to provide all of the answers or responding to every participant's posting. Participants should be encouraged to check the online discussion board regularly, to post a substantive comment in response to the discussion prompt and to come back to the discussion often during the session to read and respond to other participants' postings. For those lagging in participation, the facilitator should use private e-mail to investigate the participants'

needs and to provide gentle encouragement to get them involved in the activities and group discussion.

At the end of each session, it is extremely valuable for the facilitator to prepare a summary of the key themes that emerged during the discussion. This can serve to acknowledge the contributions of the participants in building their own learning and to highlight the common understandings developed in the workshop session. It is also helpful when participants and facilitators are able to develop personal connections within the online medium, which can be accomplished by encouraging participants to post personal bios and digital pictures and by creating a special

their online workshops and implement their local OPD programs. Following are examples of the ideas facilitators posted about how to integrate face-to-face meetings into their local programs. Dr. Tamara Blesh, library technology specialist at Gardiner Area High School, Gardiner, Maine, states:

What I will be doing for my workshop participants is to meet face-to-face on June 18th for two hours with food. I have the session carefully planned out so no one will feel it is a waste of time. Each participant will receive a packet, which consists of ISTE's Standards for Students booklet [NETS•S] and Standards for Teachers [NETS•T]; we will go over a few of the details in both of the standards. I will then take them on a tour of the Blackboard workshop and how to navigate the environment. For fun, each participant will take a digital picture of themselves and we will post it to their profile in Blackboard.

Leinda Peterman, director of the America 2000 Technology Innovation Challenge Grant states:

I think that the most important time to hold a face-to-face meeting is at the beginning, for orientation purposes. That way you can take care of all the technical issues and people get a chance to see each other in person. If it's possible to have two face-to-face meetings, it would be ideal to have a follow-up meeting a couple of weeks after the workshop ends to share outcomes and products. I would have the last assignment be to try out the lessons or strategies with students and then be prepared to share at the follow-up meeting. This kind of activity goes a long way toward causing implementation to be-

come integrated into the participants' daily practice.

### A Challenge for Leaders

School districts must provide ongoing and effective professional development to help their staff learn to use educational technology in their classrooms. OPD, when carefully tailored to meet local needs, and when well integrated with other ongoing technology and professional development plans and initiatives, provides a powerful way for busy educators to meet this challenge successfully.

### Resources

#### Web Pages

- America 2000: [www.america2000challenge.org](http://www.america2000challenge.org)  
 Blackboard: [www.blackboard.com](http://www.blackboard.com)  
 EdTech Leaders Online: [www.edtechleaders.org](http://www.edtechleaders.org)  
 (Click on Technology Integration for K-12 Teachers or Online Course Development for program and workshop information. Click on Our Research for research information.)  
 Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC): [www.edc.org](http://www.edc.org)  
 Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) OPD: [www.lausd.k12.ca.us/lausd/offices/dtcu/DTC\\_web/OPD.htm](http://www.lausd.k12.ca.us/lausd/offices/dtcu/DTC_web/OPD.htm)  
 Online brochure sample: [www.doe.state.la.us/DOE/PDFs/Opdweb.pdf](http://www.doe.state.la.us/DOE/PDFs/Opdweb.pdf)  
 Online registration sample: [www.lcet.state.la.us/DOE/OQE/regform.asp](http://www.lcet.state.la.us/DOE/OQE/regform.asp)  
 Print brochure sample: [www.edtechleaders.org/documents/dcpscoursecatalog.pdf](http://www.edtechleaders.org/documents/dcpscoursecatalog.pdf)  
 Web-enhanced lesson samples: [http://america2000challenge.org/lesson\\_plans.htm](http://america2000challenge.org/lesson_plans.htm)  
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#### Articles and Reports

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Barbara Treacy is the senior project director of EdTech Leaders Online at EDC. Barbara first surfed the Internet in 1994 using Gopher while participating in a Summer with a Mac grant as a math instructor at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, and she has been online since then. Barbara holds an EdM in Technology in Education from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and an AB from Harvard University.



Glenn Kleiman is director of COPE and on the faculty of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He has been an advocate for educational technology since the original Apple, PET, and TRS-80 computers. He is the author of one of the early books in the field, *Brave New Schools: How Computers Can Change Education* (1984, Prentice Hall) and the developer of early educational software, including *Square Pairs* (1983, Scholastic).



Kirsten Peterson is the associate project director of EdTech Leaders Online at EDC. A former high school journalism teacher and publications advisor, Kirsten became interested in online learning while telecollaborating with her students through shared server space and chat software to edit and produce publications. Kirsten holds a BA from Montana State University and an EdM in technology in education from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.