

Catherine E. Harvey

A questioning attitude may be the best approach for teachers who are considering *e-learning*—technology-based professional development programs.

E-learning refers to the way a professional development program is delivered. It is a form of distance learning that relies on technology. Teachers have to ask the same question about an e-learning program that they would about a face-to-face course: Will it meet my needs and help me meet my learning goals? Teachers also need enough technology literacy to be able to ask what is required to access and participate in the program.



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Distance Learning Continuum

← Technical requirements →					
Low	Medium				High
correspondence courses	audio conferences	e-mail	TV broadcasts via satellite	Web-based training (online courses that include streaming [audio/video], message boards, interactivity, animation, and database)	simulations (includes virtual reality)
self-study workshops	computer-based training (non-Internet)	Web pages (low level of interaction)	Webcasts		
	self-study programs on video or DVD	virtual tours	Internet/CD-ROM blended technology (audio/video/text on CD-ROM, linked to Internet for data collection, interactivity, and additional resources)		
	TV broadcasts via public airwaves	TV broadcasts via cable			

Source: RISE Learning Solutions.



Just as teachers select from an array of teaching strategies based on a child's learning goals and interests, they must consider their own learning goals and interests when looking at e-learning professional development programs. The following are some questions teachers can ask when they are considering an e-learning option.

Questions to Ask When Selecting an E-learning Professional Development Program

- Is the content based on a widely accepted publication, state or national standards, or validated research?
- Are the faculty widely acknowledged leaders or experts in the content area?
- Does the program include video? Are the images in the videos positive? Do they illustrate precise concepts and teaching and learning strategies? Do the images reflect the diversity of children, families, teachers, and communities in early childhood programs? Do the images show teachers with groups of children as well as with individual children?
- Are there frequent, structured opportunities for me to work with the content—reflection, observation, analysis, prediction, comparison, and adaptation?
- What are the options for getting and giving feedback—live call-in, follow-up conference call (telephone), chat room, real-time discussion on the Internet, e-mail, and so on?
- Is there a mentor, facilitator, coach, or master teacher who will support e-learning?
- Is a community of e-learning peers available to me?
- What technology support is available to help me access and use the program? When is it available? Is there any cost associated with getting technical help?

Technology issues to consider

- What are the minimum computer software and hardware requirements for accessing a program that uses the Internet?
- What level of skill is required for navigating such a program?
- Are my TV monitor and sound system adequate for the size of the group at the receive site for a satellite TV program? Minimum monitor size for a group of 25 is 30–32 inches.
- What technology support is available to help me access and use the program? When is it available? Is there any cost associated with getting technical help?

Selected Glossary

E-learning has its own language, which is constantly growing and changing.

For a more comprehensive and up-to-date glossary, visit www.astd.org/astd/publications/LearningCircuits/glossary.htm.



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blended technology: delivery systems that use two or more technologies (for example, video and the World Wide Web).

broadcast: [verb] to transmit television or radio signals, often from a specially equipped television or radio studio; [noun] television or radio signals designed to reach a mass audience.

CBT (computer-based training): an umbrella term for the use of computers in both instruction and management of the teaching and learning process.

digitized: converted to electronic form. Digitized data can be read and manipulated by computers and transmitted faster and more accurately than analog signals.

e-learning: covers a wide set of applications and processes, such as Web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classrooms, and digital collaboration. It includes the delivery of content via Internet, intranet/extranet, audio- and videotape, satellite broadcast, interactive TV, and CD-ROM.

e-learning facilitator: a person who mediates the learning for the student; can be a

person at the receive site who encourages full engagement in the interactive activities, directs the student to resources for additional information, and helps the student adapt the content to meet individual needs. The e-learning facilitator can also respond to reflections, responses, and questions sent to the database of a Web-based training program (see *WBT*, p.4).

ILT (instructor-led training): usually refers to traditional classroom training in which an instructor teaches a class to a roomful of students. The term is used synonymously with on-site training and classroom training (c-learning).

receive site: a location that can receive transmissions from another site for distance learning.

satellite network: two or more receive sites that are capable of receiving signals from a specific satellite or satellites.

satellite TV: video and audio signals relayed via a communication device that orbits the earth.

streamed (audio or video): audio or video played as they are downloaded over the Internet instead of users waiting for an entire file to download first; requires a media player such as Windows Media Player.

Sources: E. Kaplan-Leiserson, ed. *Glossary* (2003). Alexandria, VA: Learning Circuits. Online: www.astd.org/astd/publications/LearningCircuits/glossary.htm; and RISE Learning Solutions, Inc.

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Selected Glossary (cont'd)

teleconference: a term used often but not consistently in e-learning. It always refers to a program where the teacher-participants can see and communicate with the instructor. Teleconference implies one of several different types of delivery systems, such as a live satellite broadcast to an unlimited number of sites; a broadcast via a special telephone line to a limited number of sites; one-way video and two-way audio; and two-way video and audio. Teleconference is sometimes used synonymously with videoconference.

videoconference: a program that uses video and audio signals to link participants at different and remote locations. See *teleconference*.

WBT (Web-based training): delivery of educational content via a Web browser over the Internet, a private intranet, or an extranet. Web-based training often provides links to other learning resources such as references, e-mail, bulletin boards, and discussion groups. WBT also may include a facilitator who provides course guidelines, manages discussion boards, provides feedback on assignments, and so forth.

Webcast: [noun] a broadcast of video signals that is digitized and streamed on the World Wide Web and that may also be made available to download; [verb] to digitize and stream a broadcast on the World Wide Web.