

Innovations in eLearning

Early childhood professionals can now access training programs and courses “on demand” from home or work, and shop the Internet for courses, credentials, and degree programs that best meet their needs and interests. But teaching and learning online are new experiences for early childhood professionals. To make the best use of these tools we need to learn from those individuals and programs that show the most promise. This is an aspect of technology in early childhood education that has been getting a lot of attention in the past few years. Here are six trends to watch in the coming year.

- 1. Online Certificates, Credentials, and Degree Programs.** A number of higher education institutions offer online degree for early childhood professionals. A few with the most experience include Concordia University-Saint Paul (<http://web.csp.edu/cshs/>), Kansas State University (www.dce.ksu.edu/dce/cl/earlychildhood/), Northampton Community College (www.northampton.edu), Nova Southeastern University (www.fgse.nova.edu/), and Pacific Oaks College (www.pacificoaks.edu). See “Promising Directions for Early Childhood Professional Development” (*Child Care Information Exchange*, March 2003) for a more complete listing of online degree and certificate programs.
- 2. Collaboration.** A promising partnership between higher education and business is the Online CDA credential offered by Professional Training and Consulting (PTC) in Stone Mountain, Georgia (www.ptctraining.com) and the Early Childhood Learning Community (ECLC) at the University of Cincinnati (www.ucollege.uc.edu/eclc/). Collaboration is also the key to virtual universities that allow students to take courses from different institutions in a state and apply them toward a degree at their home campus. Successful examples include the Colorado Community Colleges Online (www.cconline.org/), the Kentucky Virtual University (www.kyvu.org/index.html), E-Lect, E-Learning for Early Childhood Teachers (www.elect.mnscu.edu) from the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, and the New York State Early Childhood Education (ECE) Online (www.nyseceonline.suny.edu).
- 3. Community-Based Training Programs.** The emerging role of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies and other community-based training programs in the delivery of online modules, non-credit courses, and CEUs is a trend to watch. Examples include E-Learn (Eager-to-Learn) classes from the Minnesota Child Care Resource & Referral Network (www.mnchildcare.org), and the online training from Child Care Resources in Missoula, Montana (www.childcaretraining.org).
- 4. Professional Development Beyond “Courses.”** There are a number of examples of technology tools and solutions that support or go beyond the provision of training programs and courses. The need for basic technology skills has been addressed by the *Illinois Director Technology Training*, developed by the Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National-Louis University (www.nl.edu/cecl), and the *Technology Toolbox* training offered in Wisconsin by the Early Childhood Professional Development Programs at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (www.sce.uwm.edu).

Discussion forums offer the opportunity to talk with experts in the field and exchange ideas and information with other child care professionals. One example is the expert hosted *Time Out! Discussion Forums* at the Center for Early Childhood Leadership (www.nl.edu/cecl) in Illinois. And the effective use of websites, electronic newsletters, distribution lists, listservs, and webcasts for networking and advocacy has been demonstrated by NAEYC (www.naeyc.org), the Children’s Defense Fund (www.childrensdefense.org), and *ExchangeEveryDay* from *Child Care Information Exchange* (www.ChildCareExchange.com).
- 5. Guidelines for Appropriate Practice.** Project CONTACT (College Opportunity Network & Technology Access for Child Care Teachers) from the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (www.fpg.unc.edu) has conducted research and developed tools including a *Guide to Distance Learning for Early Childhood Students in North Carolina* and a *Course Quality Matrix*. In Minnesota a number of organizations have written a *Guide to Effective Practices for On-line Professional Development* (www.mecsata.org). And faculty at Metropolitan State University in Minneapolis have developed a tool for *Evaluating Quality in Your Online Course: A Course Review Rubric* (www.metrostate.edu/col/rubric.html).
- 6. Faculty Development for eTeaching.** Early childhood faculty, instructors, and trainers need opportunities to learn about technology and get training in how to teach online. The *EC eTeaching Institutes* during the World Forum on Early Care and Education (www.ChildCareExchange.com) in Auckland, New Zealand, and Acapulco, Mexico, and hands-on faculty training programs in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, and Kansas were designed to meet these needs.

Another resource for faculty development is the five-course, 12-credit certificate in *Facilitating Distance Learning* offered by Concordia University’s Professional Development Consortium (www.mnpdc.org/) and the Department of Continuing Education (<http://web.csp.edu/cshs/>).