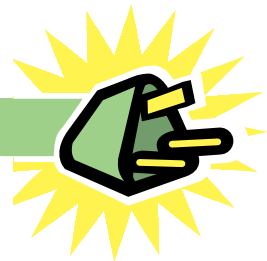


Decoding Technology

eLearning Tools

by Tim Walker and Chip Donohue



Early childhood professionals can now go to class in their PJs! An online world of training, credit courses, degree programs, and professional development opportunities is at your fingertips. eLearning never closes! Anytime, anywhere — if you can get on the Internet, you can be an eLearner. Some basic tech tools will help you find eLearning opportunities and get you off to a good start.

of Netiquette by Virginia Shea at www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html, and test your knowledge by taking the Netiquette Quiz at www.albion.com/netiquette/netiquiz.html.

Tech Terms

- **Online course:** Course information, materials, and assignments are stored on a Web site that students access and use online. May include text, graphics, audio, video, readings, discussions, and chats.
- **Netiquette:** A common set of rules and guidelines for behavior when sending e-mail or in an online discussion or chat.
- **Discussion forum:** A tool that organizes and groups comments into threads that contain a main posting and all related replies to encourage participation and interaction over a period of time.
- **Chat:** A tool that allows real-time interaction, such as having small groups work together, virtual office hours for eTeachers, or having guest speakers take questions.

Tech Tools

- **eLearning Resources** — Project CONTACT, Frank Porter Graham

Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill at www.fpg.unc.edu/~contact/index.cfm, has prepared a number of helpful resources for new eLearners including a *Quality Tip Sheet* for choosing an online course, a *Computer Equipment Sources Tip Sheet* that lists resources for free or low cost computer equipment, and an introductory *Guide to Distance Learning for Early Childhood Students in North Carolina*.

- **eLearning Skills** — Many online learning Web sites have a self-assessment checklist or questionnaire you can take to decide if you have what it takes to be a successful eLearner. Visit the Florida Distance Learning Consortium at www.distancelearn.org/readyDL.cfm to complete the *Am I Ready for Distance Learning?* questionnaire, or take the *Self-Evaluation for Potential Online Students* from the Illinois Online Network at www.ion.uillinois.edu/resources/tutorials/pedagogy/selfEval.asp.

- **Netiquette** — A positive experience in online learning requires an understanding of Netiquette. Read *The Core Rules*

Tech Tips

Here are five essential survival skills for early childhood professionals who are new to online learning:

- **Know the tech specs.** Know what tech tools (the computer hardware, software, Internet connection, Internet browser, and e-mail account) you will need to participate. Visit the Web site of the distance learning institution or organization you are considering to see the minimum requirements. Don't wait until the course begins to discover that your system isn't compatible.



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■ **Get a handle on the basics.** Seek out opportunities for basic technology training so that you are comfortable with a few key skills including word processing, sending and receiving e-mail, attaching a document to an e-mail, and searching the Internet for information and resources.

■ **Speak up.** If you can't make something work, don't know how to do something, or don't understand what is being asked of you, ask your instructor or classmates for help. Don't suffer in silence . . . odds are you're not the only one in the class who doesn't know how. And be sure to contact the "Help Desk" by phone and/or e-mail for solutions to hardware and software problems.

■ **Try out all the tools.** You'll use many new tools such as discussion forums, chat rooms, journals, electronic-reserve readings, e-mail attachments, "favorite" Web site listings, and document sharing, so take advantage of the opportunity to enhance your computer confidence and competence while learning the course content.

■ **Use 'em or lose 'em.** You'll work hard to develop new skills, so put them to use to improve your program management, enhance your parent communication, strengthen your marketing, and increase your networking and advocacy efforts.

Tech Links

To find out more about which colleges, universities, and training organizations offer online courses, credentials, and degrees, see the Buyer's Guide to Online Education Courses in this issue of *Exchange*, or visit these Web sites:

■ *Distance Learning in Early Childhood Education*, National Child Care Information Center,

www.nccic.org/poptopics/distancelearning.html

■ *Distance Learning Resource Guide: Education and Technology Issues*, Head Start Information and Publication Center, www.headstartinfo.org/infocenter/guides/dl_intro.htm

■ *National Directory of Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Institutions*, Council for Professional Recognition and the National Center for Early Development and Learning, www.cdacouncil.org/

■ *Schedule of Non-Traditional Classes and Trainings*, California Child Development Training Consortium, www.childdevelopment.org/schoverview.htm

Sources

Donohue, C., & Clark, D. (2004, November). "Learning Online: The Places You'll Go!" *Exchange*, 160, 49-54.

Donohue, C. (2004, September 16). "Tips for eLearners." *EducatorsOnlineExchange*.

Walker, T., & Donohue, C. (2004, March). "Decoding technology: Discussion forums, chats and webcasts." *Exchange*, 156, 20-21.

Walker, T., & Donohue, C. (2004, July). "Decoding technology: Professional development tools." *Exchange*, 158, 66-67.

Coming in
July/August 2005:

Decoding Technology:
Hosted Discussions

School Directory to Online Education Courses

As higher education institutions scramble to put traditional face-to-face courses online the quality of the content, instructional design, learning experience, and student support can vary. Before you enroll in an online course, be sure to consider the following:

Learning Experience

- Easy access to your instructor — virtual office hours, e-mail, telephone
- Clear expectations and directions and timely feedback from instructor
- Friendly, accessible learning community
- Interactions with instructor and students

Student Support/Customer Service

- Technology requirements identified
- Self-assessment available — Are Online Courses for Me?
- Easy access to technical support — 24/7 HelpLine, Online HelpDesk

Content and Instructional Design

- Instructor's training and online teaching experience
- Course format and delivery system that match your learning style, needs, interests — preview a course web site
- Ease of use — user-friendly interface; simple login; easy and logical navigation; access to materials, resources and virtual library

Circle 49 **Accel E-Media, Inc.**
Certificate: Introduction to Child Care
 Washington, DC, USA
www.accelemedia.com

Introduction to Child Care. Interactive online training course designed to help new employees learn the basics of quality child care. Available 24/7 at www.accelemedia.com.

Circle 43 **Child Care Education Institute**
Online CDA
 Duluth, Georgia, USA
www.cceionline.com

Earn your CDA online at your convenience — set your own schedule. A structured program with your own "Education Coach" for personalized guidance. College credit option.

Circle 48 **Concordia University**
Bachelor of Arts Degree Completion programs, or Graduate Degree programs offered online.
 St. Paul, Minnesota, USA
www.csp.edu

Concordia University offers bachelor's and master's degree in Early Childhood and Family Life Education via online education. Designed for busy adults, our accredited, cohort-model programs provide learners with cutting-edge theory and practice. Visit us online at www.csp.edu or call 1-800-333-4705.

Circle 73 **Minnesota Child Care Resource & Referral Network**
Certificate
 St. Paul, Minnesota, USA
<http://etl.mnchildcare.org>

Eager to Learn, a nationally recognized online learning program is designed to provide quality, affordable educational opportunities for people who care for children. Child care providers and school-age professionals can enjoy learning valuable information from the comfort and convenience of home. Eager to Learn was featured in NAEYC's Young Children Magazine.

Circle 74 **National-Louis University**
Graduate Degrees in Early Childhood Administration
 Chicago, Illinois, USA
www.nl.edu/ecd

The 24-month ECA program is for current and aspiring leaders of early childhood centers, preschool owners, Head Start coordinators, and consultants to early childhood programs.

Circle 76 **NOVA Southeastern University, Fischler School of Education and Human Services**
Accredited AA, BS, MS, Ed.S, and Ed.D
 North Miami Beach, Florida, USA
www.schoolofEd.nova.edu/earlychild

Combine the use of distance learning technologies with on-site formats.

Circle 77 **Pacific Oaks Online**
BA and MA in Human Development
 Pasadena, California, USA
www.pacificoaks.edu

Human Development provides a framework in theory and practice for professionals working with children and families. Discuss online work-based issues in leadership, communication, diversity, and program quality for children. Receive credit for life experience.

Circle 50 **University of Cincinnati**
Associates & Bachelor Degrees
 Cincinnati, Ohio, USA
www.eclc.uc.edu

Enjoy the flexibility and convenience of online education as you complete your degree from a regionally accredited institution, the University of Cincinnati.

This directory is a partial listing of online education courses. Inclusion does not imply endorsement by Exchange. To request free information from these companies, visit www.ChildCareExchange.com or circle the number for each company of interest on the Product Inquiry Card located between pages 64 and 65.

Arkansas Tech University
Russellville, Arkansas, USA
<http://commmed.atu.edu/ECE.htm>

Bay Mills Community College
Brimley, Massachusetts, USA
www.bmcc.edu

Brenau University Online College
Gainesville, Georgia, USA
<http://online.brenau.edu>

CO Community Colleges Online
Denver, Colorado, USA
www.ccconline.org/

Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado, USA
www.csu2learn.colostate.edu

E-LECT
St. Paul, Minnesota, USA
www.aeyc-mn.org/

Erikson Institute
Chicago, Illinois, USA
www.erikson.edu

Haywood Community College
Clyde, North Carolina, USA
www.haywood.edu/hccflsh.html

Kean University
Union, New Jersey, USA
www.kean.edu

Kentucky Virtual University
Frankfort, Kentucky, USA
www.kyvu.org/index.html
www.kctcs.edu/

Loyalist College
Bellevue, Ontario, Canada
www.loyalistc.on.ca/learn/programs/0601_distance.html

New York State ECE Online
Albany, New York, USA
www.nyseceonline.suny.edu

Northampton Community College
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, USA
www.northampton.edu

Northeast Wisconsin Tech College
Green Bay, Wisconsin, USA
www.nwtconline.comp

Saint Paul College
St. Paul, Minnesota, USA
www.saintpaul.edu/academics/programs/development/

SUNY Learning Network
Albany, New York, USA
http://SLN.suny.edu/SUNY_online_courses/degrees

Teikyo Post University
Waterbury, Connecticut, USA
www.tpuonline.com/ece/

University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, Nebraska, USA
<http://advance.unl.edu/distance/degrees/ecsepg.html>

University of Phoenix Online
Phoenix, Arizona, USA
www.uoponline.com/eedu

U of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA
www.sce.uwm.edu
www.uwm.edu/Dept/EducOutreach

University of Wyoming Online
Laramie, Wyoming, USA
<http://ecampus.uwo.edu/Science>

Vanguard University
Mesa, California, USA
www.vanguard.edu/

Western Washington University
Bellingham, Washington, USA
www.wce.wvu.edu

Online Training Programs only

Minnesota CCR and R Network
St. Paul, Minnesota, USA
www.mnchildcare.org/

NHSA HeadsUp! Reading
Alexandria, Virginia, USA
www.heads-up.org

RCC Learning Center
St. Paul, Minnesota, USA
www.rcclearningcenter.org