CyberSmart! Online Workshops Facilitated Professional Development in 21st Century Skills

Participants' reflections and comments excerpted from workshop discussion forums

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Developing highly qualified teachers by using a professional learning community

"This was my first online course experience, and I thought that this was a very valuable, and purposeful professional development. I know for a lot of us this was even more of a positive experience because we are in the same building and could easily continue these interesting conversations that we were engaging in online. In terms of professional development, I feel that this course has penetrated through the surface of so many important issues."

"Imagine if we [all the educators in our school] met regularly to discuss common attitudes towards cyberbullying and other concerns, and discussed possible preventative, educational approaches to help educate our students about these issues …Transforming our school culture by first addressing our educators [to] engage in professional dialogue would be a great starting point to address cyberbullying and other issues."

"I learned from both the assignments and the interactions with participants. Communicating this way, through written posts, …I find my ideas come clearer when I write them, and I learn more concretely this way, as well."

"Taking part in the online surveys and posting things immediately made the learning much more meaningful, especially when I could instantly see what others wrote. Using any online tools, especially with kids today can be very beneficial. It's their language, it's what they know and are comfortable with. So why not utilize that tool!"

"Having access to my peers comments and a wealth of expert information at any time I logged on was awesome."

"Look out world!!!! Web 2.0 here I come! I've started a wiki!!! Check it out …"

"23 years of teaching ... and such big changes taking place ... thank goodness for this course. Without this collaborative group ... without the interaction ... without the glimpse of connectivity that's out there, I'd be at almost a total loss for what to do. I guess in a nutshell that my awareness is raised considerably, and I at least have an inkling on what path to take. … For starters, I'm using CyberSmart!'s Curriculum in the classroom ..."

Providing convenient anytime/anywhere learning

"This was my first experience taking a course online, and it was an entirely positive one for me. I felt I had ample time to do my work, and to explore the site. The more I clicked around, the more interesting nooks and crannies I found, sparking my interest and learning process. I think that someone with less experience at the computer may find it just as friendly."

"I was very comfortable in this online learning environment. The asynchronous nature of the forums fits in with my lifestyle very well — I can't guarantee I can get to a training site at 4:30 PM every day, but I can guarantee I can login for a few minutes every day at some point before I go to bed."

"I really enjoyed the experience and especially liked that I could participate whenever I wanted to. The watching of the [CyberSmart!] Knowledgebase [of experts] videos in PJ's with a cup of tea was especially liberating."

"I have been reluctant to sign up for on-line learning because I tend to be very over scheduled, and unless I have something scheduled on my calendar, it often does not get done. My concern has always been that I will sign up for something, and then not complete the requirements because of all my other commitments. I found that putting some time on my calendar each week, along with gentle prompting from our [facilitator], allowed me to not only complete the course, but to actually get something out of it."

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Answering an essential question: "How can we use what we have learned to guide student learning?"

"I understand how important it is now for students to create questions instead of picking a topic to research. Also, how important it is for a student to have a connection and/or interest with that question. If there is no interest and/or connection, the motivation will not be there in most cases."

"I wholeheartedly agree that it is important to train children in cyber ethics at an early age. I also think we should reinforce that training throughout the year. I'm sure it would be easy, for example, to address this in your Art History class by discussing copyright laws concerning copying original images posted on the Internet."

"This is an area that we really should be speaking to students about. I guess I'm not as concerned about people watching what I do online as I am concerned about the privacy of information that I input on different Web sites. I need to get a lot better about reading privacy policies and checking cookies on my computer — this should definitely be something that is part of the cybersafety curriculum at any school!"

"Over-thirty five years of teaching plagiarism has been a major issue for me. It made me reevaluate my teaching not just blame the students. As students become so good in cyberspace the challenges as a teacher became greater, driving me to find ways to encourage not punish, to achieve the proper academic results."

"Thanks for sharing the information about Bernie Dodge. … love the WebQuest idea to create a radio program with a video drama format. That could be the topic for the grade 6 podcasts that we will be doing with the new MacBook lab. It would be a good way to integrate copyright law. The students could send an email to the author/owner of the music or image that they want to use. … Let's talk on Monday...."

Providing experts to facilitate research-based decisions

"This learning experience was very valuable. The CyberSmart! Knowledgebase [of experts] is an incredible resource."

"I loved listening to the experts. They were short and to the point. When you listened to them all you walked away with a deeper understanding of the topics."

"I felt like I was learning, in easy bites, from real experts. Their word-choices never seemed above my comprehension. I appreciated that all video and audio on CyberSmart! is accompanied by transcripts; I found them to be helpful references while I did my assignments."

"There were so many valuable aspects of this workshop. The most valuable aspect though may have been the information that I received about copyright and fair use."

Engaging educators hands-on in the same kinds of learning they are expected to facilitate in the classroom

"I can remember sitting in several classes over the years with a book, a notepad, a pencil, and a teacher standing at the front of the room writing notes on the board that we had to copy. I can remember how bored I was and now when I look back on it, I can't remember much of what I was taught in those classes. The classes I remember were the ones where we took on our learning, we were actively involved. This workshop has kept me actively involved throughout the entire process and I've enjoyed it."

"I understand better how online learning can be integrated with regular classroom learning to provide more resources and a broader learning venue. It is sort of like taking a trip without leaving your classroom.

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Helping educators create a safe learning environment for students

"Even if all the bullying were to take place outside of school, as long as kids are forced to be together during school hours, we have the responsibility of making sure that they feel safe. I don't mean just physically safe, but emotionally safe as well."

"Educating the children themselves to make smart choices in their lives seems the best bet to keep them safe, and lead to a rewarding future."

"The more educated teachers are about both the technologies available to students and what signs to look for if a student is being bullied by text or over the Internet would help to decrease the number of incidents of cyberbullying."

Collaborating on instructional strategies to engage students and support higher achievement

"Hearing what some of my colleagues do in their classes has made me rethink and rework some of my assignments."

"I have now come to realize how wrong I was. We accept differing learning styles in our students, why not accept their learning culture is very different from our own?"

"Thanks for directing me to Dr. Joyce Valenza in the [CyberSmart!] Knowledgebase [of experts] … I really liked how she mentioned helping kids to understand how these skills really relate to essential life skills. I like to get into the "So what?" question with my students whenever I introduce a skill because as we all know well, student buy-in can start with students wanting to know what relevance the lesson has to "real life." I thought she did a nice job of connecting real life situations to the examination of the validity and purpose of Web sites and information."

"The most useful bit of information that I found was the practical idea of being prepared for that "teachable moment" in class when you come upon a [hate] site. Instead of just clicking out of it, [Carol M. Stern-Larosa from the Anti-defamation League] suggested instead letting students see your thinking process in action when you decide that a site is unreliable or hateful. … This fits in nicely with what I already do with students when they write and research, but I had not thought about "getting into it" with a hate site. The more I think about it, the more I realize that I have missed an opportunity to explore author's purpose, intended audience, and format used to reach their purpose. We do this with our own writing, why not with others?"

"One of the speakers mentioned not choosing only from the first 2 pages of Yahoo hits, looking for the best possible information. I was thinking of a lesson where the students had to answer some sort of general reference question in Google or Yahoo, but couldn't use the first couple of pages of results. That might be an interesting experiment for me. I'll keep you posted."

"Your comment about revamping research projects really hit home with me. Here's something I've been kicking around in my head, tell me what you think? … I'd like to try not having the students actually write the paper, but rather place the entire emphasis on the research and the works cited page. The Which One, Why, What If questions would work well with this format. Thinking in terms of your careers project, the student would wonder "how much money would I make, do I have to go to college, why I would not want to be a librarian?"

"Next year, our librarian and I are going to focus on developing research skills with our students and teachers. [She] has already created a draft outline of what skills would be appropriate to teach at each grade level (6-8). We also want to plan training early in the year for our teachers. Our main focus is to introduce students and teachers to the "Invisible Web" and help them to create good essential and subsidiary questions and keywords."

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Connecting workshop knowledge and skills to the classroom

"I taught the Smart Keyword Searching lesson to 8th graders as they were beginning research for a major term paper. … Students think they understand everything there is to know about online searching. The bottom line is that they are computer literate (can cut, paste, play with graphic files, download, etc.) but they are not information literate. I have watched kids surf endlessly through Google with poor results. Often, they have no idea what to enter as a good search term. I thought this excellent lesson would help them create effective search terms for their major research."

"I talked about the Invisible Web yesterday in class when I taught our students about one of our subscription databases. I love the term and I think it communicated to students that you can find information in the databases that are "invisible" when you search ordinary search engines. … It was nice to put [what] I learned to good use."

"Maybe we should not be thinking about [embracing new technologies] as implementing these things separately. Obviously when you are working with science your kids need to know how to read, write and do math. Doesn't it make sense to be learning about the "core" subject areas and integrating of technology synonymously?"

"I enjoyed the blog experience. It's a great way to communicate and get feedback regarding topics of interest to you. This on-line [Workshop] experience has felt like a blog because you post your thoughts around a topic — but then you get to put your spin on it. … I wish students could blog more at school … Something about the computer and your own space makes some people feel more at ease with responding. Could be a real benefit."

"I learned a lot about plagiarism prevention and I have been thinking of ways to alter my assignments. Good professional development in the context of what we do and where we are — job-embedded — and that is really productive."

Providing educators with the background to support home-school-community connections in online safety and security

"The results of the poll show how conflicted many of us are on placing sole responsibility for online safety onto any one group — whether it's parents, schools, or elsewhere. We all know that students react to information differently depending on where the information is coming from, so perhaps, as many have said, it truly needs to be all-encompassing. Depending on the district and the parental involvement, the people most present when kids are online may be either parents OR school personnel."

"As educators we have to also bear some of the responsibility for our students online safety. We have to teach them (and their parents) how to use the Internet safely and effectively. We have to work with the parents to ensure the safety of our students. I don't believe that it is solely the responsibility of the parents or solely the responsibility of the educators to teach the children/students how to use the Internet safely. I think that it should be a partnership between parents, teachers, and students — everyone should share the responsibility."

"Participating in this course reignited my desire to educate the parents, teachers, faculty, staff and students on Internet safety and security."

Offering in-depth professional learning over four weeks, sustained by enthusiastic face-to-face encounters and supportive resources: the free CyberSmart! Educator Toolbar and the free CyberSmart! Student Curriculum

"This really is a first try for me on a more formal basis at using specialized databases. It's been a good way to get my feet wet, and I must say they felt pretty soaked right now. Did I gain valuable experience? Yes. Is my head spinning from staring at the monitor for so long? Yep. For me, I think it would be best to have all the educator databases right at my fingertips so I am looking forward to using the [CyberSmart! Educator] Toolbar."

"The fact that the course took place over a four or five week period helped you to, sort of, layer and absorb bits of information which then in turn gave me the opportunity to make more meaningful reflections on specific topics."

"Thank you very much for this experience. This workshop has generated many great discussions not only on this Web site but also at lunch and in the halls of our school."

"I have really enjoyed the conversations and it is encouraging that the conversation[s] are continuing in the hallways among colleagues."

"The fact that the workshop was over a four week period made it easier to process the information given."

"The CyberSmart! [Educator] Toolbar, and the free lesson plans, are great tools to take away from class, as well; the links, as reference and refresher, will aid in communicating what I've learned to coworkers."

"I also liked taking this course with others I worked with so that conversation took place beyond the course."

"Loved this experience! The conversation has continued in school."

"Offer more. Good way to get to talk with colleagues about important issues. Thank you!"

Who participates in CyberSmart! Online Workshops?

The quotations featured here were selected to represent the wide range of educators participating in CyberSmart! Online Workshops, including the following:

- Art teachers
- Business teachers
- Computer instructors
- Computer lab assistants
- English teachers
- Guidance counselors
- History teachers
- Industrial Arts teachers
- K-6 classroom teachers
- Language Arts teachers
- Math teachers
- Principals

- Paraprofessionals
- Reading teachers
- Science teachers
- School librarians
- School library/media specialists
- School nurses
- School principals
- Special education teachers
- Teaching assistants
- Technology coordinators
- Technology resource teachers
- Technology integration specialists

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