

Online Professional Development: Growth Via the Internet

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As educators, we should always be looking for ways to enrich our teaching experience and grow in our professional lives. We often attend conferences, workshops, and possibly take courses during the school year, or attend summer school, to pursue personal interests and provide professional growth. The challenge, unless you live in a very large center where these things are offered, is that they require us to take time away from our job and our families and involve travel and the expenses associated with that such as transportation, lodging and meals. These factors may prevent us from taking part in a professional growth activities that are not required by our employers.

The advent of the Internet has addressed some of these issues. Via the Internet we are able to do everything from attending virtual online conferences to completing recognized academic degrees without having to leave the comfort of our home zone. Along with being less disruptive to our professional and family life, online options enable us to garner the knowledge we are looking for at a greatly reduced cost, thus saving money for us personally and for the employing organization we are associated with. Once you get into this type of online learning, you will find it is a very cost-effective method of delivering information, bringing people together from vast geographical distances, and providing access to quality professional development opportunities that you might not be able to attend otherwise.

So what are some of the opportunities that are readily available for you?

TDEC Webinars

The North American Division through the Technology and Distance Education Committee K-12 (TDEC) (<http://www.nadeducation.org/tdec>) provides online webinars on a regular basis addressing various practical technological developments. If you are unable to attend the webinar when it happens, you can visit their archives and watch a recording at your leisure. The archive also offer excellent opportunities to review webinars you've already attended. Some of the topics covered include the new Pathways reading series for Adventist schools, the usage of the online version of Encyclopedia Britannica, and other tech related tools such as Google Tools, Jing, and Cool Web Tools for teachers. In January, the webinar introduced teachers to Corel suite of tools provided free to all schools by the NAD. There is no cost for any teacher wishing to attend these webinars. They just need to have a current user ID and password and they are ready to sign up. Follow this link (<http://www.nadeducation.org/tdec/10>) to learn more about the webinars that are available. The webpage indicates that a letter of attendance can be requested to document your participation for professional development.

K12 Online Conference

Another easily accessible professional development opportunity is the K12 Online Conference (<http://k12onlineconference.org/>) that is held each fall. It invites educators from around the world to participate in exploring how Web 2.0 tools and technologies can be used to improve learning and is free and open to everyone. The actual sessions

take place over a two-week period in October through November and follows the format of face-to-face conferences including keynotes and breakout sessions. Most of these have been recorded and archived so you are able to access them anytime. The archives go back to the 2006 conference. The site invites you to be an active participant, not only during the conference but also afterwards. One of the taglines I came across billed it as “The conference that never ends”. This year’s theme was “Cultivating the Future”. One of the interesting features of this site is what they call the “Online Echo”. Each month they re-broadcast one of the presentations to give you the opportunity to watch the sessions with others and then ask questions to the person who gave the presentation. See the webpage to find out what is being “Echoed” this month.

LearnNowBC 2011 Spring Conference

The LearnNowBC Conference began as a face-to-face conference, but was revamped last year to be totally online. This year’s version will be both a “face-to-face” event for those wanting to travel to Vancouver and an online experience for those desiring to participate without leaving the comfort of their armchairs. The theme for this year’s conference is “Personalized Learning for the 21st Century” (<http://conference.learnnowbc.ca/>) and it takes place April 17-19. The registration fee is \$150 for online participants before February 15 and \$175 after. Just to give you an idea as to the savings in terms of cost, we would have spent over \$5000 to take our staff to this event, but the actual cost of participating online will be less than \$1000. Again, the keynotes and breakout sessions are recorded so, unlike a face-to-face conference, if two breakout sessions you are interested in are happening at the same time, you can attend one live, and then view the recording of the other later.

These are just three of many different options that are out there for you to assist with your professional growth. I have participated in all of these so I am able to vouch for their value and interest. Explore the different options that can be brought to you where you are! They open up more opportunities using a method that benefits everyone financially.

Go! Explore! Connect! Learn! And most importantly . . . Grow!