Selecting Quality Online Professional Development

Allyson Dean: Hi, everyone. Welcome to "Selecting Quality Online Professional Development." My name is Allyson Dean. I'm the director of training and resource development for the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning, and I'm joined today by my colleague, Brittany. Brittany, want to say, "Hello," to everyone?

Brittany King: Hi. My name is Brittany King, and I am the LMS administrator for the iPD. I'm so happy to be here with you guys today.

Allyson: Thanks, Brittany. Here's what we're hoping you'll be able to do after this short presentation that we share. Hopefully you'll feel comfortable describing the benefits of online professional development, and you'll be able to use tips to identify and select some quality online professional development for yourself or for your staff, and you should be able to explain different online learning styles and share some information about the individualized professional development, or iPD, portfolio that Brittany is going to talk about that's now available on the ECLKC.

So let's start with the benefits of online professional development.

I think we all know that when done well, online professional development offers great potential for changing teacher or home-visiting practices, but what we might not know is how to spot quality online learning. Today, we'll share some tips, we'll help you navigate some of the options available online, and hopefully prepare you to support your own or your staff's professional development needs. So let's start with some tips. How do you know if online professional development is right for you or for your staff?

Well first of all, just like with all professional development, we want you to be intentional, right? That means really aligning the choices you make about the content you want to learn about or that you're hoping your staff will learn. That you make intentional choices about that. Sometimes we think that online learning is as simple as maybe narrating a PowerPoint we did at an in-service training sometime for our staff, and while in a pinch we've all had to do that, what we know is that there are so many great options that we don't have to do those kind of stopgap methods anymore.

We can actually think about understanding who our learner is, right? So whether you're looking for yourself or your staff, think about your learner's preferred style of taking in information and then be intentional about what content fits with that learning style. You might also think about goals you've set and supervision, if your staff member has a professional development plan or just something you're really interested in learning about. Those things will set you up for success because it's something you're really interested in learning.

Of course, when we're talking about online professional development, we have to talk about removing barriers, right? Sometimes, technology doesn't come easy to all of us, so you really want to think about if you're a supervisor, what your staff person needs. Do they have access to the Internet? Do they have the technology software needed to really take advantage of some platforms? And, really, do they have the time? Right? So think about your staff right now if

they're home with children, what types of online PD they might need. They're going to be shorter; they're probably going to be things that can be done in the evening or on their own time, so those are the types of barriers you want to think about to really set people up for success. And that kind of leads into other things like thinking about long-term professional development success.

So if you're choosing online content, think about things like, does this online content align to national standards? Whether those are NAOIC standards or CDA standards or even your state core knowledge and competencies, does the professional development align in such a way that if someone takes that course, it's really going to count towards whatever career pathway they're on?

Similarly, you want to think about things like whether or not the courses offer contact hours or continuing education units because those really ensure that staff can document their learning for you, or if you're looking for yourself, that you can document your own learning for things like teaching certificates or CDA renewals that you know you have to have documented professional development to accomplish.

What are some other things to think about? Well, simple things like making sure that whatever online platform or training you've chosen or suggest to your staff, that it's easy for them to get help with things like technology. You also want to make sure that it's simple, right? That staff know or that you know how to complete the course, right?

What are the expectations? And will I have enough time to complete it? For some content, you might think about creating a community of learners, and that might seem odd when we're talking about virtual PD because a lot of times we think about virtual PD as something you do on your own, but even in virtual online learning, you can link to a community of practice. If you're a Head Start staff person, you could set up a small community of practice in MyPeers, or maybe you have other social media platforms you could use.

Some courses, themselves, build in communities of practice, discussion boards, and other ways of interacting, so you want to think about whether that's an option you want to have present in the online professional development you choose. The other thing is, if you are a staff person, and you are supporting your supervisor through online professional development, you want to be a learner yourself, not only to model that constant cycle of inquiry where you're curious and learning more and more, but also so you can anticipate and know the experiences that your staff are going to have. Ultimately, choosing the right online professional development for you or for your staff really includes considering things like why, who, what, and how of online learning.

So let's start with why.

Online learning, like all meaningful learning, begins with thinking about your why. Why are you interested in this learning opportunity? And what are you trying to accomplish? If you're suggesting online professional development for others or your colleagues, your teammates, or your staff, what are you hoping they'll get out of it? What do you want them to learn? The answers to these questions really ultimately should be how you choose the professional development that you're thinking about.

Once you know your why, you can think about the different ways that learning occurs, whether you want your learning to be asynchronous, where you're really learning at your own pace and independently, or synchronous, which is a more sequenced approach. So on this screen here, you'll see some characteristics of asynchronous learning, right? Asynchronous learning often includes things like audio and video clips.

Maybe you do reflection through email. There might be a discussion board, a wiki or a blog, webcasting and conferencing, and even game-based learning. All of those things are typically found in asynchronous or autonomous online learning events. Synchronous learning might consist of things like chatting and instant messaging, video and audio conference again, live webcasting, application-sharing, Whiteboard, polling, or even the development of a virtual classroom. Synchronous learning options are where groups really come together. That might be just at scheduled points throughout the course, like a checkpoint, or you could have groups pace through content together in a sequenced manner.

Thinking these things through before selecting online professional development can really help you match your purpose or your why to the learning opportunities you choose. So selecting online PD begins with why, as I just said, or your desired outcome, but other things like who and what also need to be considered when you're selecting online professional development.

So who means the characteristics of your learners.

Are they teachers? Are they program directors, home visitors, family child care providers, family service workers? There's a plethora of roles that you might be framing professional development for, or these might be roles that you yourself have in your work life. You also want to think about context, ages of the children served, and the demographics and characteristics of the families that these staff work with.

Your what is, of course, your content. What's that key information that is going to be shared through the learning opportunity? And how is really thinking about the organization and facilitation of the learning experiences, right? So what are my learning goals? And what are some adult learning principles that I want to keep in mind when I'm selecting an approach to online professional development? Let's think about this in a real-life scenario that might be familiar to our Head Start audience.

If you think about two Head Start leaders here on the screen, each committed to designing effective professional development experiences for their staff, but they have different whys or different desired outcomes. So the Head Start site director here has a desired outcome to raise awareness and knowledge of a specific policy. Her goal is to make sure that all of her staff know and understand the program's mandated reporting requirements, and this is probably a training that she has to deliver every year to a mixed audience, right?

Some new staff who are just starting and those who are more seasoned. The Head Start education manager, on the other hand, has a different why or outcome. She's looking for her education staff to increase their use of open-ended questions with children during small group activities, or for home visitors to use open-ended questions with families and support them to do the same.

Now each of these Head Start leaders has to consider their why and how alongside their who. So for the Head Start education manager here, the implementation of a specific teaching or home visiting practice in context is her desired outcome. So the online learning opportunity she chooses will probably be relatively complex, and it'll probably require some high effort from the learner.

She'll also likely want to ensure that that online learning is paired with coaching or other job-embedded follow up, whereas our Head Start director's desired outcome is increased knowledge. So her professional development strategy will likely be less complex. It will require probably a medium or low level of effort from her learners, and her learners could likely learn the policy on their own in an asynchronous learning experience with learning checks built in. The point here is that when selecting online professional development, it's important to consider questions of alignment like who your learner is, or who you are as a learner, and how the content aligns with the strategies and learning opportunities you suggest or choose for staff.

Now who is really important, and so let's talk a little bit more about that. Who is directly related to how we choose online learning opportunities that are meaningful. So for most of us, our who is likely millennials, although some of us are certainly working with a mix, right? We've probably got baby boomers, Gen Xers, millennials, and even maybe some Gen Zs. More and more, at least according to the census data, though, Head Start programs are likely working with and training millennials.

We're probably, some of us, are even millennials ourselves, so why does this matter? Well, we've got to remember: When we're choosing online learning, we have to know our who, and if our who are millennials, then we really want to think about their preferences for tech use and learning. Sometimes we think Generation Z employees are the same as millennials. We tend to loop them together, but really Generation Z employees, sort of born in the mid-1990s and late 2000s, they are true digital natives, meaning they have grown up with smartphones and other digital devices.

Millennials, by contrast, may remember a time without smartphones, so although they're similar in that both of these groups really see on-the-job training and continuous PD as more important than maybe a traditional college degree, there are some slight difference to keep in mind. So this slide just shows the characteristics of sort of our tech use across generations. Millennials, baby boomers, and what they call the Silent Generation, born in 1945 or earlier.

So probably where most of our folks are, Gen X or boomers, and this slide really shows that really across the generations, the use of smartphones and social media is really growing, and that's important because it shows that there are some commonalities across all the folks we're choosing and delivering PD for.

When we think about that sort of modern approach to learning or modern learners, we have to think then about what that means about the type of content they want to interact with, and so here are some things on the screen that we think are probably pretty typical of modern learners: that they're quick to try new technology, that they value knowledge over just getting a degree, they don't necessarily feel the need to be in a classroom to learn, and they prefer

schedule flexibility and on-demand style information. This is important because that means that when we get to the how of online PD, we need to keep those things in mind. Here is a snapshot of what modern learners are paying attention to. This research was done by HubSpot, and it shows the breakdown of what people pay the most attention to versus what they may choose to skim for information.

Videos top the list here with 55% of respondents saying that they pay close attention to video content. There's no question that video is a huge part of how we all take in information, right? Whether through social media, YouTube, really anywhere you look online, you're going to see a video. I often use YouTube as my go-to now for figuring out how to do things like unclog a drain, really anything in my life that I need help with, I can usually find it on YouTube; it's pretty amazing. And the lesson here for us as it applies to educational training is that we really want to choose and promote online courses or training that embed video as a way to really capture the attention of the learner.

Here are some other tips for choosing content that aligns with the perspectives and approaches of modern learners. As I said, making sure that learning is flexible and on-demand where learners can choose their path. So that really plays well to things like learning management systems that offer a menu of options, and that you work with your staff or you for yourself. Choose things that interest you and create an individualized path. We definitely want content to be bite-sized, meaning that it's just the right size. It's just enough information to pique interest and really usable and practical.

And in a few minutes, when Brittany's talking through the iPDs, she'll share some of our bite-sized content that we found to be super effective in our work with educators. We definitely want to choose courses that encourage discovery. In other words, you know, really thinking through the reason why — why someone is doing something. You're sort of driven by the need to see impact. So whether that's me trying to unclog my drain or something more lofty like your educators understanding that the course or the skill — the course they're taking or the skill they're learning is really contributing to the organization as a whole.

That's super-important to the modern learner. We definitely want to offer continuous training, as I said, particularly with millennials and Gen Zs who really value that online learning. Modern learners really like goals to work towards, and that doesn't mean a big promotion or a new job necessarily, but just that they can grow within the positions they already hold. In fact, online training, mentoring, and coaching, really, over a third of millennials said that they would be more interested in that type of offering in the workplace than even promotions and pay raises.

That those types of things are things that are most important to retaining these folks in the workforce. Gamification is something that's really important for the modern learner, too. It can provide some really fun feedback about performance and, you know, celebration when they've completed a course, and then as we already talked about, making sure that it embeds video and other multimedia to really hold people's attention.

Finally, before I turn it over to Brittany, I want to share a few things about existing resources because one thing we know is that, really, high-quality online learning can be expensive, especially if you're thinking about standing up or buying into a leaning management system to

host a variety of options for people to choose from. So we really recommend that instead of going it alone, you investigate kind of national, state, and even local options to see if you can leverage existing resources yourself to meet your needs. Many state and local communities offer early childhood education professional development through existing LMSes or online training channels.

States typically have some sort of platform for online learning either through their CCDF-funded quality initiatives, maybe their local child care resource and referral agency, a university system. Sometimes even local adult education programs offer online learning as well, so tapping into these types of local resources can really create some cost efficiencies for you, and the added bonus is that if you use an existing system, it's probably already linked to local and state training approval requirements, and completion can probably be tracked and counted within your state's quality rating and improvement or licensing system.

Might even help your staff move along a career pathway if your state has an early childhood registry and career pathway that they belong to. Here's a national resource available to you for your use with infant/toddler staff. I always like to share this Early Educator Central web page because a lot of folks don't know about it, but it's really tailored towards infant and toddler professionals. It highlights linkages to free and low-cost coursework, all developed and approved by some sort of federal funding.

There's access to things like high-quality infant/toddler video clips and other training resources that can really help if there is not a lot of infant/toddler training options in your area. Another go-to resource that I always recommend is the EarlyEdU higher education learning modules, so these courses from EarlyEdU really are built on a competency and practice-based framework. If you are familiar with any of the 50-minute in-service suites on the ECLKC, this approach will be familiar to you, so these learning modules are similar, but they go a bit deeper than the in-service suites, and they combine theory and the latest early childhood education research with students' field-based learning.

The modules range anywhere from one and a half to three hours long, and they include media-rich PowerPoint presentations, presenter notes, and learning activities. And then within this, participants can film and reflect on their own practices with video assignments. That could be super-helpful if you're trying to do coaching or supervision from a distance. So the last ... Actually, this is where I'm going to transition back over to Brittany. So this is our individualized professional development. This is a learning management system that OHS has invested in and hosts, and Brittany's going to walk us through this now and give us a little more information about this innovative platform.

Brittany: Thank you so much, Allyson. So to get us started, I'm going to show you a quick video that outlines what the iPD is, some of the courses that we offer, and the benefits of online learning with the iPD.

[Video begins]

Woman: Interested in professional development but want to do it on your own time, at home, on the go, even on a coffee break? Check out the iPD: the Individualized Professional Development Portfolio. The iPD offers free online courses that you can explore on your own or

with coworkers. Some of our courses include the beginning teacher series for preschool, the Home Visitor e-Institute Leave the Bag Challenge, Baby Talks, Practice-Based Coaching, and coordinating comprehensive services. All iPD modules offer CEUs, or certificates of completion, so you'll get credit for participating. It's online learning on the go provided by the Office of Head Start. Join the over 3,500 users by logging in with or creating your ECLKC account to get started.

[Video ends]

Brittany: So now that we understand what the iPD is, let's discuss why it's a valuable tool for online professional development. The iPD is a tailored online platform that caters to Head Start's professional development staff. Courses have been crafted to meet the needs of Early Head Start, Head Start home visiting, and child care professionals. Participants will receive free Continuing Education Credits, or CEUs, or a certificate of completion for many of the courses when we successfully complete them.

The iPD's convenient features include many of the things that Allyson mentioned in the first half of this presentation aligned with training and professional development requirements and competencies. It's accessible anytime and anywhere via desktop or tablet using the mobile responsive site, and many of the courses offer free and Continuing Education Credits. It also supports ongoing professional development for staff in Head Start and child care settings. So iPD users log in to the system through their ECLKC account, so there's no need to remember two usernames or passwords; it's a single sign-in system.

So this is the student home page. It features easy access to frequently visited pages, such as the course catalog, the ECLKC site, and also the help desk. So we're going to take a look at some of those pages now. The first thing that we're going to take a look at is the course catalog. The course catalog provides a complete listing of courses that are offered in the iPD to help users customize their learning experience by choosing a course that is meaningful to them. iPD courses can be used as Head Start directors and managers plan ahead for their programs. For example, if a program is considering conversion to infant/toddler slots, managers might want to use the beginning infant/toddler teacher training to train staff members who may be working with preschool-age children.

Courses can be located by scrolling through the catalog, entering the name in the search bar or using the tags feature, all of which you can see outlined in red. Tags include audience, setting, age group, or even ELOF domains. The catalog includes descriptions of each courses – or each course, the estimated time it will take to complete, the CEUs that users can earn, and you can also enroll directly in the course from the catalog by clicking the enroll me button. So now we're going to look at the My Courses page.

This section provides direct access to the courses that the user has already enrolled in. There is also a My Courses section on the home page to provide users with multiple ways to easily access their classes. You can see in the red outline that I have highlighted the box that you would click on to access the My Courses in the sidebar section. So now that we've explored the catalog, let's take a look inside one of our most popular courses, the Home Visitor e-Institute Leave the Bag Challenge. So this is a screenshot from one of our courses.

As I mentioned previously ... Popular courses, and the goal of this particular course is to enhance home visitors' capacity and knowledge to support parents' ability to facilitate their child's learning in the home. The e-Home Visitor Institute also uses a lot of features that Allyson mentioned previously that appeal to our audiences, including bite-sized content, gamification of courses, and embedded videos and other multimedia.

As we said, many of the iPD courses, including the Leave the Bag Challenge, offer free CEUs. So here is how you would access them. You would go to the My Records page, and as the green arrow indicates, you would just click on that ribbon, and that will download your certificate for you in PDF form. There are also many robust supports for users where they can get help quickly.

So this is where you would go if you needed help. We have a support center that has frequently asked questions, how-to videos, tutorials, and then also the help desk contact form. So you can see an example of each of those down at the bottom. So the iPD help desk will lead you to this particular page.

That is the Wufoo form right there in the middle that you would fill out to get in contact with us, and then like I said, we have tons of how-to videos. So one of the videos that I've highlighted on this particular slide is a tour of the iPD home page. We also have videos that show you how to search and enroll for courses, and that's something that we're constantly adding — new how-to video tutorials.

So, in conclusion, we really hope that this encourages you to get your grantees to join over the, at this point, almost 17,000 users. This is actually an old slide; we've been growing by leaps and bounds, so we would really encourage you to take advantage of the 30 courses that we offer on the iPD, and just like the number of users that we have, the number of courses that we offer is constantly growing, and we're also working to add courses in Spanish. So to close out, let's take a look at what one user had to say about our course, "Addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences In and Out of Classroom Environments."

And so this particular person, Heather, said, "The course was very informative and interesting. I learned some new things about dealing with trauma and adverse childhood experiences. This gives a new look at children that may be struggling and things to think about." So we hope that this has been a helpful overview of the iPD, and to close out, I am going to turn it back over to Allyson.

Allyson: Thanks, Brittany. Thanks everybody, for listening. We hope this was helpful. We hope to see you on the iPD soon and have a great day.