



Roundtable on Online Communities of Practice

Co-hosted by edWeb.net and Footsteps2Brilliance

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# What are the opportunities and challenges of creating online communities of practice for educators?

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## Summary Report by

Neal Goff, President, Egremont Associates

Dr. Mari Pearlman, President, Pearlman Education Group

Lisa Schmucki, Founder and CEO, edWeb.net

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*Social networks can be used to provide educators with career-long personal learning tools and resources that make professional learning timely and relevant as well as an ongoing activity that continually improves practice and evolves their skills over time.*

*Online communities should enable educators to take online courses, tap into experts and best practices for just-in-time problem solving, and provide platforms and tools for educators to design and develop resources with and for their colleagues.*

—National Education Technology Plan 2010

*The edWeb.net Roundtable on Online Communities of Practice brought together a community of education professionals from diverse sectors in the education industry who share an interest and experience in creating online communities of practice for educators. The event was held in Washington, D.C. on August 25, 2011.*

The goal of the meeting was to talk openly about the opportunities and challenges involved in creating online communities from various perspectives. This report summarizes the results of the meeting.

What is an online community of practice for educators?

*An online community of practice is a community of education professionals with a common area of interest who use collaborative technology to exchange information that enriches the community's knowledge and practice, and provides a strong, professional support network.*

Key questions raised by the panelists:

- How do you create active and engaged online communities of practice?
- What are some obstacles to the creation of vibrant and useful online communities in education settings? Why do these exist? Can they be removed?
- What is the role of leadership or curation in online communities and who is best suited to fill this role?
- What motivates educators to participate in online communities, and how can motivation be improved?
- How can online communities better support teacher professional development? Can it be made a formal part of professional development and certification?
- What is the role and value of Facebook vs. sites that are more tailored to the needs of educators?
- What is the role that different organizations can play in the growth and support of online communities of practice? And how can they work together to better support each other and share information across sites.

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## Welcome Remarks

- Ilene Rosenthal, Founder and CEO, [Footsteps2Brilliance](#)
- Lisa Schmucki, Founder and CEO, [edWeb.net](#)

Ilene Rosenthal, founder and CEO of Footsteps2Brilliance, opened the meeting by welcoming panelists and roundtable participants to her residence; the meeting took place in a 3rd floor conference space with a view of the spires of the Washington National Cathedral. Lisa Schmucki, edWeb.net founder and CEO, echoed the welcome and introduced the keynote speakers, Karen Cator, Director of Educational Technology for the US Department of Education and Darren Cambridge, the Senior Consultant and Project Director from American Institutes of Research. Together, they are directing the Department's *Connected Online Communities of Practice Project*, and it is with a description of this project that the discussion began.

## Special Guests and Opening Keynote

Learn more about the U.S. Department of Education's [Connected Online Communities of Practice Project](#).

- Karen Cator, Director of Educational Technology, [U.S. Department of Education](#)
- Darren Cambridge, Senior Consultant, [American Institutes for Research](#)

Karen Cator began by drawing particular attention to the chapter on teaching in the five-chapter [National Education Technology Plan](#). From the outset, those working on the plan wanted readers to have no doubt that technology was imagined, in this plan, as a support for educators, not as a replacement for teachers. Indeed, a major concern was how to change the notion that teaching was work for solo practitioners. Because learning is very largely social and participatory for all learners, technology-based social networks would seem to provide a natural forum for such interactions and leverage this common foundation for learning.

The *Connected Online Communities of Practice Project* is about figuring out how to make the promise of social networking deliver sustained value for educators and their students. Ms. Cator explained that the project is looking at several aspects of online communities. First, project participants are examining the continuum of community purposes and functions, from networks of individuals, to “guilds” of individuals who have common expertise or interests, to highly collaborative and multi-faceted groups who co-create new knowledge and content by purposefully combining different talents and areas of expertise. Second, the project is looking at what Cator calls “articulation:” the detailed observation and description of practices across many different kinds of communities, with particular attention to their successes. Findings in this area are being published on the project website as they are completed. Third, the project is examining community development, with a focus on policies and procedures that would ensure access to technology wherever people are, and whatever the circumstances of their use. Finally, the project has an overarching research agenda across all of these aspects.

Darren Cambridge, Senior Consultant at American Institutes for Research, spoke next about this research agenda. He explained that from the research perspective, there are two primary purposes for the research. The first, and most important, is research to help answer this question:

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How do we use social networking to increase the learning capacity of educators and help them become more connected to students and resources in order to improve student learning?

To explore this question, project researchers are pursuing three strands of inquiry:

- How do communities evolve? How do they begin, what are key decision points in their existence, what are the consequences of decisions made at these points, and what are growth patterns in communities?
- How can a community create a high level of engagement so that knowledge is produced and formalized in content that can be shared and keeps members engaged and productive? What are the intrinsic motivations for engagement of community members?
- What kinds of leadership and other roles exist in communities, and what is essential in those roles for community success? What is the role of informal leadership in a community?

The second major purpose of the research associated with the *Connected Online Communities of Practice Project* is research designed to answer this question:

Which research techniques will work best to help community leaders and members themselves understand and improve the effectiveness of their communities?

Dr. Cambridge explained that project researchers are using innovative research methodologies to further these two purposes. The first is called “design-based research.” In this work, researchers design community activities and inquiries in selected communities, working within the existing community and observing the effects of and responses to their activities and inquiries. This approach allows for rapid iterative cycles of inquiry, as researchers try out their ideas, learn from the effects, and either expand or change their approach. A second research methodology is “social network analysis,” which is the formal analysis of the information that social networking technology automatically collects. Who talks with whom, and how often, and when and on what subjects—all of this is of great interest in the attempt to understand how communities actually work. Finally, researchers are using a methodology called “narrative research.” In this work, researchers explore the “stories” community users tell in two ways. The first is to elicit straight narrative stories from community members about the value the community provides. Dr. Cambridge alluded to the analytical framework of [Etienne Wenger](#), as one of the analytical frameworks researchers are using to probe and categorize these narratives. The second narrative research strategy is to look at many narratives before they are actually categorized by a framework, and discover common patterns or threads among them.

In regard to the second major purpose of the research—finding techniques and methods that could be used by communities themselves—Dr. Cambridge said that social network analysis appears to be almost ready for the non-research application.

# Roundtable Report (cont'd)

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## Views from the Frontlines

*Hosted and moderated by Neal Goff, President of the Board, Association of Educational Publishers and President, Egremont Associates*

The panelists:

- Tom Carroll, President, [National Commission on Teaching and America's Future \(NCTAF\)](#)
- Keith R. Krueger, CEO, [Consortium for School Networking \(CoSN\)](#)
- Thomas P McCool, Ed. D., President, [Eden Autism Services](#)
- Susan Adelman, Director of Business Strategy, [Follett Software Company](#)
- [Michelle Luhtala](#), Head Librarian, New Canaan High School
- Ilene Rosenthal, Founder & CEO, [Footsteps2Brilliance™](#)
- [Shannon Holden](#), Assistant Principal, Republic Middle School

The panelists were asked to describe their experiences creating online communities of practice, what their goals were, where they succeeded, what challenges they faced, and what they thought the key issues were for others engaged in similar activities. Their comments are summarized below.

### ***Tom Carroll, President, National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF):***

Mr. Carroll provided a historical perspective, arguing that groups of educators need to make a transition from being “teaching organizations” to “learning organizations.” Teaching organizations, he said, traditionally have been led by “artisan teachers” — that is, highly skilled professionals who are the best at their craft, similar to artisans in any other profession. What we have now, he said, are not really communities but rather networks of artisans, or what he called “artisan guilds.” They collaborate with each other — sharing insights, resources, lesson plans, and the like — but they still ply their trade individually, as lone practitioners.

Ultimately, said Mr. Carroll, we need to transition to having educators working together on interdependent learning teams. In a true collaborative community, he said, team members' roles are differentiated. (By way of illustration, he said, an Olympic hockey team is a collaborative community, because each team member plays a different role, in contrast with a group of Olympic figure skaters, who may train together but perform individually.)

Developing effective interdependent teams, said Mr. Carroll, is a genuine challenge. He described his organization's work in creating what he called “learning studios” in nine high schools and six middle schools in four Maryland counties. In the high schools, teams of six teachers from different disciplines collaborate in the learning studios, with each educator playing a different role. In addition, they reach out beyond the faculty to involve others who can support their efforts. The organization's initial focus, Mr. Carroll said, was building the teams offline. Now that they have gotten off the ground, the next step is to foster online collaboration among the teams, using edWeb.net's social networking tools and capabilities.

# Roundtable Report (cont'd)

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## ***Keith R. Krueger, CEO, Consortium for School Networking (CoSN):***

Mr. Krueger also started with a historical perspective, saying that communities are nothing new and are an American tradition. He also noted that professional associations, which in essence are communities, have been around for a long time.

The question he posed, then, was: what do we mean by online, and what's different about it?

One relevant change, he said, is that we now have a participatory culture in which citizens create content instead of relying on the content that experts push at them.

Mr. Krueger noted that organizations like CoSN always have to grapple with the inherent tension between their desire to serve their mission and their need to sustain themselves, collecting dues and generating other kinds of payments from their members. He said many associations, including CoSN, have been trying for years to create communities, often unsuccessfully. It takes time and effort, he said, and the associations have to deal with difficult issues such as what to give away versus what to charge money for, and how to compete with Facebook and other commercial entities.

His tentative answer to the question of what unique role associations can play in the online world, he said, involves curation: associations can find the best content and make it available to their members. However, he noted, this is still a "top-down approach," and we need to continue to seek and experiment with new tools that facilitate genuine participation.

Mr. Krueger said that CoSN is excited to be a partner in the Connected Online Community of Practice Project<sup>1</sup>, because it's not just a community for school technology leaders but is a partnership that involves with principals, superintendents, other administrators and school board members. He enumerated several challenges, however, as follows:

- How to encourage participation, especially across disciplines.
- How to deal with the fact that people who are already using tools such as Facebook don't want to have to fill out yet another profile.
- The problem that even after communities are up and running, the information within them stays hidden. In addition, conversations keep getting repeated and/or the most recent comment often is the only one that gets any real exposure.

He also said it is important within a community to create an ethos of transparency. That is to say, learning needs to be "reported out" and shared; otherwise, conversations that involve three or four people don't end up benefiting anyone else.

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<sup>1</sup> *Connected Online Communities of Practice Project* is a three-year initiative sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, implemented in partnership with the American Institutes for Research and five other organizations, of which CoSN is one.

# Roundtable Report (cont'd)

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## ***Thomas P McCool, Ed. D., President, Eden Autism Services:***

Dr. McCool started by explaining his organization's mission, which is to improve the lives of people affected by autism. The schools he works with are different from other schools, he said, in that they are not preparing their students for secondary education; rather, their goal is to prepare students for independent living and employment.

Dr. McCool said he gets calls from teachers who have one or two autistic students in their class and are often frantic because they have no idea how to handle them.

He said that after he met Lisa Schmucki, they started discussing creating an autism community online. However, he said, he was surprised to learn that the young teachers he deals with don't seem to think of technology — which they are heavily involved with in their personal lives — as a tool that can help them do their jobs. Even the heavy users are fearful of technology, he said, and don't see its application for educational purposes.

Eden has tried many different approaches, he said, and has learned that what really motivates teachers is knowing, very specifically, what to do. "We found that teachers were trained in behavioral intervention," he said, "not in teaching skills. Their schedules were geared toward keeping the children occupied."

He said Eden developed a curriculum focused on children with the most severe problems. Eden established two online communities on autism, one for elementary level and one for secondary level teachers. They were introduced in March, and the response, he said, has been "incredible." More than 2,000 teachers are now participating in two online communities.

He attributes the growth to the communities' practical focus, helping teachers who say, "I've been assigned this job and I don't know what to do." The communities address specific issues like how to use iPads in class, or how to deal with bedtime issues.

He doesn't know if the communities' success is transferable to other fields, observing that autism has always been a community of "forced collaboration."

## ***Susan Adelman, Director of Business Strategy, Follett Software Company:***

Ms. Adelman said she would bring the perspective of a solution provider to the panel. Her company, she said, has provided technology platforms to its customers for decades. "We think of ourselves as a partner, not a vendor," she said.

From a technology provider's perspective, she said, online communities have traditionally been customer groups or user groups. Ms. Adelman said it was interesting in the current environment to see these "walled gardens" evolve into open conversations. "They have a different flavor," she said. "They are not just talking about our products."

She also noted a shift in how marketing is done in the current environment: "There's been a market shift. It's not about what we say; it's about what our customers say to us." It's important, she said, for

# Roundtable Report (cont'd)

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marketers not just to drive the conversation but to hear broader conversations among their customers.

Ms. Adelman noted that Follett spends a lot of money on marketing, but now spends less on messaging than it used to, and is redeploying its spending to do “good things” that benefit the company because of the kinds of information it gathers as a result. “We need to listen, not talk,” she said.

As a solution provider, she said, Follett’s role is to create content and share it across different groups. The challenge, she said, is to figure out how to take the knowledge base gained from providing technical support and leverage it across communities, blending it with the conversations that are taking place in those communities.

“We often are involved with customers at their moment of need,” she said. Ideally, she said, Follett would like to connect people together, right at that moment, with the solution.

## ***Michelle Luhtala, Head Librarian, New Canaan High School:***

Ms. Luhtala started with some general observations about education, one of the goals of which, she said, is to create cross-cultural, cross-boundary collaboration. Connected teachers make connected learners, she said; without that, we won’t create true 21st century learners.

She noted that there is a committed core of motivated, self-directed educators. But others, she said, are overwhelmed and timid and feel disenfranchised. She is concerned about the growing divide between the connected and non-participants; “that’s my worry,” she said.

Ms. Luhtala also discussed teacher evaluation programs, which she said almost never include credit for participating in online communities. After participating in an online program, she said, teachers always ask, “Can I get a certificate of participation?” When they are provided, she said, the certificates don’t go anywhere.

Ms. Luhtala argued that professional development needs to recognize and reward teachers for what they do online — even for their use of Twitter and Google+, for example, for educational purposes. She also argued that teacher evaluation shouldn’t all be conducted top-down by administrators. To be consistent with the concept of 21st century learning, she said, teacher evaluation should involve educators’ peers and the members of the communities in which they participate.

## ***Ilene Rosenthal, Founder & CEO, Footsteps2Brilliance:***

Ms. Rosenthal added the perspective of an entrepreneur with 20 years’ experience in educational technology whose goal, in her current venture, is to accelerate learning for young children.

She cited some statistics to frame the problem she is confronting in her work. Some 46% of children, she said, enter kindergarten at risk of failure, because they have not been exposed to the academic language they need to succeed. 88% of them never catch up. “We’re throwing away almost half of our population,” she said.



# Roundtable Report (cont'd)

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61% of those children have no books at home. We all know, she said, that vocabulary and oral language skills are key to early learning. Children from lower-income backgrounds hear 30 million fewer words at age 4 than more privileged children do.

Ms. Rosenthal outlined three key ways to solve this problem:

- 1) Provide children with really engaging learning experiences
- 2) Provide their teachers with high-quality professional development
- 3) Get their parents involved

One piece of good news, she said, is that at-risk communities now have a high incidence of smart phone ownership. This means that the technology infrastructure for educating at-risk students is in place as never before, which she said creates exciting opportunities.

Ms. Rosenthal said she learned through her prior experience as a musician working with piano teachers that if you teach children a skill through an engaging game, they will get it. She also noted that at education conferences, the sessions on inexpensive games that can be used in the classroom are always full. "Teachers are desperate for good games that teach effectively," she said.

She said her company, Footsteps2Brilliance, creates "recipes for success." All the resources teachers need to create their own learning games are in the program. Then, within the community, other teachers can use them and rate them. There is recognition for the "master teachers," and everything created is aggregated together into a "digital filing cabinet."

Ms. Rosenthal plans to head up a community at edWeb.net on early education and technology. "A lot of people believe that kids shouldn't be near technology," she said. "This is not true." She recounted her experiences seeing low-income children teach themselves to read by pressing buttons on a mobile device. Not only is technology effective in teaching young children, she said; it encourages parent involvement as well.

## ***Shannon Holden, Assistant Principal, Republic Middle School:***

Mr. Holden, who teaches education students in addition to working at a middle school, played back some of the answers he got after posing this question to colleagues and students: "Why *wouldn't* you join an online community?"

The answers (paraphrased below) included the following:

From students:

- I don't want to ask for help
- I don't want to look dumb
- If I know how to do something well, I don't want to look like I'm bragging

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From teachers:

- I don't know how to use the technology
- I don't see the value
- I don't want to hear about (others') successes
- I don't want others to know about my successes (for competitive reasons)
- I don't want others scrutinizing what I'm doing
- I'm on overload
- I'm frustrated by Internet filters
- Social networking should be fun, not work-related

Mr. Holden also described the problem of the replacement cycle. That is, he said, school administrators are constantly introducing new programs — the “next big thing.” Teachers don't fully implement the new programs because they know that yet another new program will come behind the latest one. “This too shall pass,” they think. So, even when a school provides them with something valuable, they often just go through the motions in implementing it.

Mr. Holden said this phenomenon shouldn't stand in the way of technology adoption — since technology is clearly here to stay — but the mindset is there.

He also described the “what's in it for me?” syndrome, which he said is particularly prevalent among older, more experienced teachers. With each new program, they want to know: will I get recognition for using this? More pay? A certificate that my boss will see? Will my students perform better as a result of my using it?

His response to such negativity, he said, has been: just keep putting out more content. He also said his attitude toward Facebook is, if you can't beat it, join it. He observed that teachers have started to post their own materials on his Facebook pages, and mentioned that any user who “Likes” a page will receive an update on his or her Facebook wall whenever new material is posted.

“I'll just continue putting out content,” he said, “and if we do it well enough, people will join.”

## Q & A Discussion

After the panelists finished making their presentations, there was an opportunity for Q&A and discussion.

The first question was: what's the “killer app” that might make online communities of practice really take off?

“It hasn't been invented yet,” said Ms. Luhtala. With current technology, she said, “The motivated folks stay connected on their own. You have to be sophisticated to understand it all. If you're not yet comfortable, you might reject the whole thing.”

## Roundtable Report (cont'd)

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She added that what edWeb is providing is a transitional environment — a “safe place” — where people can learn about technology one step at a time and get increasingly comfortable with it. “Just like with kids, we have to scaffold learning,” she said.

Tom Carroll said: “The killer app is not an app. It’s interesting that young teachers in their professional lives don’t see how technology can help them.” He noted that vendors, understandably, sell to the market it as it is — a market of “artisan individuals.” The market for collaborative teaching practice is not there yet, he said, because we haven’t developed collaborative teaching skills. He said that the killer app would be to change the culture in schools so that there would be real demand for socially networked learning tools.

Another question was how to build effective new communities of practice in a world where so many communities are up and running.

In response, Tom Carroll observed that the current generation of schools was built as closed systems — “boxes within boxes, with closed proscriptive curriculums,” he said. “We build filters and firewalls.

“The people we need to learn from are young,” he said. “If we set the students free, they’d teach us in a week. We’re not the ones to take us where we need to go.”

Karen Cator observed: “We’re past the ‘teachers don’t know how to use technology’ phase. The bigger question is how to make education a profession, like law or medicine... We could think of learning as a product, and drop learning opportunities everywhere, giving people badges when they do certain things.” The killer app, she said, is beginning to create badges for education professionals as they develop their craft.

Tom Carroll added that what happens in professions like engineering, medicine or defense is that professionals work with industry partners to co-create the tools they need. “We’re still in the mode of, ‘let’s make a product and see if we can get anyone to use it.’ We need to create an environment where teachers, students and vendors create solutions together.”

A member of the audience observed that not everyone in the education community can make a quantum leap forward; people need to progress step-by-step. Online communities are great for helping people move forward gradually, she said.

Brad Henry, President of Edu-Technologic at the Ohio State University, said, “It’s not how you teach your students; it’s how you enable them to bring you along with them. If you (as a teacher) don’t use technology, you’ll lose your students; they’ll fail, and eventually you’ll lose your job.” He added that teachers need to identify the technology that fits their needs.

Another question was whether there is an online venue where principals and superintendents can congregate. Audience members offered several suggestions, including edWeb.net, the Connected Principals blog, and “lots of small niche sites.”

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When will administrators “see the light” about online communities? Keith Krueger said that CoSN is beginning to increased support for open networks. He cited the example of a school superintendent in the Birdville (TX) Independent School District who, having decided he wanted to create an online professional community, launched a page on Facebook and invited his colleagues to follow him.

## Roundtable Discussions

*Facilitated by Dr. Mari Pearlman, Founder and President, Pearlman Education Group*

Following the Panel Discussion, panelists joined the attendees at individual tables for an open discussion of challenges and issues. Moderated by Mari Pearlman, founder and president of Pearlman Education Group LLC, the discussion began with a brief conversation at each table intended to identify the table group’s most critical issues, new and as yet unmentioned issues, and potential solutions.

Questions and challenges articulated by the table groups fell into two primary categories:

1. online communities (and other technologically-based innovations for instruction) from the teachers’ perspectives
2. implementation and management of online communities

In Category 1, the issues and questions, listed below, centered on the realities of the current culture of teaching, which is dominated by feelings of powerlessness and a fear of appearing inadequate because one is not already an expert. Ranging from the most basic issue—how to get teachers started in online communities of practice when many districts block access to the internet—to complex issues of managing levels of expertise, these questions and the discussion about teachers’ roles clearly outlined numerous challenges. Here are the issues raised:

- How can teachers be engaged in online communities of practice when district technology policies specifically prohibit access to the internet in schools?
- How can we expect teachers to connect to professional communities of practice if they are afraid to admit that they need help or guidance?
- How can a professional community of practice accommodate and acknowledge multiple different levels of expertise, and promote and validate best practices so that teachers actually learn something from participation?
- How can the following widely held teacher beliefs be managed and changed:
  - Teachers report having little time to engage with each other
  - Teachers are afraid to ask for help
  - Teachers are reluctant to use technology because they have not received training
  - Teachers experience “information overload” because there are so many options available to them—they do not know where to start
  - Some teachers really think that online communities are a passing fad, and will not lead to lasting change

## Roundtable Report (cont'd)

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- How do we begin to get teachers involved in meaningful online community activity, especially communities that engage issues of professional development that are at the heart of what teachers care about?

In Category 2, the issues and questions, listed below, surfaced three primary areas of concern. The first is a kind of technical barriers and obstacles challenge—the issues center around potentially incompatible platforms, integration of new and established communities, and the effects of community size on community functioning. The second set of issues concerns the quality of the discourse and information shared and discussed in an online community of practice. Given the ubiquitous and continuous nature of online information flow, these issues center on how to create mechanisms for quality assurance and quality control, especially in communities of practice that center on scholarly pursuits in teaching and learning. Finally, there are issues that arise from the realities of established school communities and the potential of online communities—how to ensure that decisions about technology use practices are based on real knowledge, how to involve students in communities of practice that will enhance outcomes for them, and how to manage the increasingly complicated issues of privacy in the world of instant and continuous information. Here are the issues raised:

- Do you create a new community for educators or leverage one that is already built?
- If educators are using many different platforms, how do you connect participation across all of them?
- Does the number of members in any given community affect the value or effectiveness of that community?
- Is the community of practice scholarly? How do you measure that?
- What should the role of leaders/curators be in a “democratized” environment?
- How do best practices bubble up to the top in an environment in which just about everyone is inundated?
- How does a community deal with technology gatekeepers (such as school boards and others who have policy-making and decision-making authority) who do not understand the technology?
- How is it possible to partner with students to advance learning using online communities of practice?
- How is it possible to strike the appropriate balance between privacy and transparency?

In the open discussion that followed the table groups’ articulation of issues and challenges, the conversation focused almost exclusively on the challenges to teachers, given current realities in the teaching profession. In regard to technology use policies, Keith Krueger remarked that the National School Boards Association is engaged, with COSN, in grappling with that issue and helping to draft guidelines for use policies that satisfy real fears about privacy and inappropriate content, and at the same time acknowledge the centrality of this medium for teaching and learning in the 21st century.

Teachers’ fear of asking for help or appearing ignorant was a central issue in the discussion. The technology itself—and the online community of practice—must be immediately evident in both its functionality and its usefulness to teachers if it is to be used. How teachers are to be freed from their fears of sounding or looking ignorant so that they can learn in an online community of practice with real openness was

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a challenge underscored by several of the practitioners in attendance. One suggestion was to position participation in any online community of practice from an asset, as opposed to a deficit, perspective: everyone brings something to the community and it is contributions that are highlighted and publicized, whatever other learning may be taking place as well.

Three connections with the earlier Panel presentations are notable, in this regard. Tom Carroll talked about “artisan guilds,” in which the most expert demonstrate their accomplishments and the less expert learn from them. Tom McCool’s remarks about the Eden autism community of practice on edWeb.net, and its phenomenal success with practitioners, supports the notion that if an online community of practice meets a need practitioners themselves have identified, the technology and the time to use it will not be a barrier to success. While Tom Carroll strongly advocates moving beyond the “artisan guild” model prevalent in teaching today, Dr. McCool’s remarks make clear that online communities of practice may make such a model available to communities of practitioners that have not yet even attained that level of sharing and collaboration. Michelle Luhtala’s remarks emphasized the need to integrate teachers’ use of online media and opportunities to further their professional knowledge and interaction. Ms. Luhtala, echoing other participants’ comments in the roundtable discussion, suggested that teacher evaluation standards and strategies need to recognize teachers who use these media to further their practice and build standards for professional development. Finally, she pointed out the growing divide between “connected” teachers and non-participants—a challenge at the heart of many of the issues and questions raised in the second part of the discussion.

## Conclusions

As is clear from the panelists’ comments as well as the questions raised in the roundtable discussion, we are in the early stages of both using the technology that supports online communities and understanding the dynamics and values of communities created in response to the technology’s promises. The challenges of access, education and training for users, community building and engagement, and integration of online communities of practice into the established world of scholarship and practice are formidable. On the other hand, the technology and the communities it enables are in many ways inherently rewarding to users, as many roundtable participants noted. We hope this is the first in a continuing series of roundtable meetings that bring together people of varied experience, interests, and expertise to confront these issues, pose questions, and begin to articulate possible answers.

# Learn More

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## **Transforming American Education: Learning Powered by Technology**

The National Education Technology Plan 2010 issued by the U. S. Department of Education recommends using social networks to create communities of practice that help educators share tools and resources, evolve skills over time, tap into experts and best practices, and provide platforms for educators to design and develop resources with and for colleagues. *Learn more at* <http://www.ed.gov/technology/netp-2010>.

## **Connect and Inspire: Online Communities of Practice in Education**

The U. S. Department of Education has issued a draft report for the *Connected Online Communities of Practice* Project. The report is targeted to education leaders and stakeholders who are interested in exploring, starting, or strengthening online communities of practice for educators. The report is designed to help education stakeholders and practitioners understand, implement, and participate effectively in online communities. *Learn more at* <http://connectededucators.org>.

## **CoSN**

In the fall of 2010, CoSN and 5 other organizations began work on a 3-year contract with the U.S. Department of Education focused on online communities of practice. The project has two arms—research and implementation. The research of the project is actively informing our use of online communities of practice across several leadership initiatives in the association. In March of 2011, we launched access4ed.net, an online community of practice for district leaders and teams focused on innovative approaches to providing access to education and technology. We center our activities on such issues as Bring Your Own Technology (BYOT) initiatives, Broadband access, and other issues. The community currently has over 380 members and we have recently created partnerships with AASA, NSBA, NAESP and NASSP through which we will be addressing the interests of their audiences in the topics at the center of the community. We are also implementing online communities of practice in our leadership initiatives focused on Participatory Learning: Leadership and Policy (funded by the MacArthur Foundation) and Closing the Gap (funded by the Gates Foundation).

Founded in 1992, the Consortium for School Networking (CoSN) is the premier professional association for school district technology leaders. CoSN is

committed to providing the leadership, community and advocacy tools essential for the success of these leaders. We do this through a national and several regional conferences; a webinar series; regular periodicals and newsletters; and through an array of leadership initiatives addressing issues of central concern to district leaders.

*Learn more at* [www.cosn.org](http://www.cosn.org)

*Learn more at* <http://connectededucators.org>.

*Join access4ed at* <http://access4ed.net>.

## **edWeb.net**

edWeb.net is a professional social network for the education community. Members can connect with peers, share information and resources, spread innovative ideas, and create professional learning communities. edWeb promotes collaboration with easy-to-use tools like blogs, discussions, messaging, calendars, polling, wikis, and file sharing. edWeb.net is transforming education through social networking by creating new models for online professional development and learning communities. edWeb.net has a partnership with MCH Strategic Data to reach out to more than 3 million K-12 educators in the U. S. and encourage them to join an online community of practice. edWeb has formed a Consortium for Online Communities of Practice to work closely with organizations and educators who are committed to building active and engaged communities. edWeb.net is free for educators and is funded with the support of our sponsors.

*Learn more at* [www.edweb.net](http://www.edweb.net).

## **Eden Autism Services**

Eden, a New Jersey-based nonprofit organization, was founded in 1975 with a mission to improve the lives of children and adults with autism and their families. Parents and professionals alike joined together to develop a family oriented, multifaceted program with a well-trained and dedicated faculty. Inherent in Eden's founding was the commitment to provide a cost-effective, community-based alternative to institutionalization and to offer programming that would meet the changing needs of children and adults with autism. Eden has launched a community on edWeb, "Effective Strategies for Teaching Students with Autism" that provides lesson plans and webinars for teachers from preK through grade 12.

*Learn more at* [www.edenservices.org](http://www.edenservices.org).



## Learn More (cont'd)

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### **Follett Software Company**

Follett Software Company is the integrated educational technology solution provider that more than half of America's school districts trust to support staff and engage students in today's digitally rich learning environment. Follett's digitally powered technologies help districts more efficiently and cost-effectively manage traditional and digital educational resources, provide digital learning environment tools focusing on student achievement and make confident decisions based on quality academic data. Powerful, integrated solutions enable Follett to support today's collaborative learning community and empower 21st century learning and discovery. Follett Software Company is a subsidiary of Follett Corporation, a \$2.7 billion, privately held company that provides products, services and solutions to the educational marketplace. Follett Corporation was founded in 1873 and has its headquarters in River Grove, Ill. Follett Software Company is the sponsor of several communities on edWeb.net including "Using Emerging Technology to Advance Your School Library Program," an online community of more than 2,500 librarians.

*Learn more at [www.follettsoftware.com](http://www.follettsoftware.com).*

### **Footsteps2Brilliance**

Footsteps2Brilliance is a comprehensive early learning program that uses mobile technology in order to connect school and home and expand traditional strategies for parental involvement. The curriculum emphasizes reading/language arts, mathematics, critical thinking skills and creativity. Footsteps2Brilliance accelerates student achievement by uniting the power of mobile gaming technology with the latest in cognitive research. Enticing, interactive, 24/7 learning experiences digitally link school and home to give students the edge they need for success in school today and the world tomorrow. Footsteps2Brilliance was founded by Ilene Rosenthal, a seasoned educator and executive who uses her expertise in education to help all children succeed academically. Through her work with schools, education associations and government agencies, she develops partnerships that help to disseminate best practices for improving education for all children. *Learn more at [www.footsteps2brilliance.org](http://www.footsteps2brilliance.org)*

### **National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF)**

NCTAF is a non-profit, non-partisan research, action, and advocacy organization dedicated to providing every student with a highly qualified teacher in schools organized for success. For over a decade, NCTAF has been a leading voice on the importance of closing the teaching quality gap to close the student achievement gap, especially in high-need schools and high-priority disciplines. Through collaboration with professional organizations throughout the country, NCTAF provides leadership for innovation in teaching and learning in America's public schools. NCTAF firmly believes that the power of technology should be put in the hands of teachers and students to extend teaching and learning beyond the walls of school. Preparing students to participate in a global, knowledge-based economy is a challenge no teacher should face alone. Teachers must be empowered to collaborate — aided by online communities of practice that allow anytime/anywhere interaction. *Learn more at [www.nctaf.org](http://www.nctaf.org).*

### **MCH Strategic Data**

MCH Strategic Data is a leading source of compiled data on education, health, and government institutions in the United States. MCH is a privately-owned company that has been in the education market for over 80 years. MCH is the owner and compiler of a national K-12 education database that spans the early education market through grade 12. MCH is a strategic partner of edWeb.net and is supporting the growth of online communities of practice by working with edWeb.net to invite K-12 educators all across the country to join the edWeb online professional learning network. MCH provides special email rates for any organization that would like to build an online community of practice on edWeb.net.

*Learn more at [www.mchdata.com](http://www.mchdata.com).*



# Presenters and Panelists

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**Susan Adelman**, *Director of Business Strategy*  
[Follett Software Company](#)

Susan is former college instructor and a software industry veteran. In her current role at Follett, she is focused on advancing the usefulness of technology in education through digital, mobile, and social learning. Follett has been supplying innovative educational tools and services for over 135 years, with a current global education footprint in 125 countries.

**Darren Cambridge**, *Senior Consultant*  
[American Institutes for Research](#)

Darren Cambridge, Ph.D., senior consultant, education technology and online communities of practice, serves as project director for the U.S. Department of Education's *Connected Online Communities of Practice* project and a consultant to the NSF-Funded Search CAMEL (Climate, Adaptation, and Mitigation e-Learning) project. Previously he was a faculty member at George Mason University, a director at the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE), and a fellow with the EDUCAUSE National Learning Infrastructure Initiative. He has led, facilitated, and developed technology for a wide range of national and international cross-organizational, geographically distributed collaborative projects over the last 15 years, including the Inter/National Coalition for Electronic Portfolio Research, the IMS Global Learning Consortium ePortfolio Working Group, EDUCAUSE's association-wide Virtual Communities of Practice Initiative, the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Campus Program, and the Building Educational Attainment in Minority Students project. His research appears in a wide range of scholarly journals and books. He is the author of *Eportfolios for Lifelong Learning and Assessment*, published by Jossey-Bass in 2010.

**Tom Carroll, Ph.D.**, *President*  
[National Commission on Teaching and America's Future \(NCTAF\)](#)

Tom Carroll leads NCTAF in its mission to empower educators who are transforming their schools from teaching organizations into learning organizations. Tom founded the Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers to Use Technology ("PT3") program, and created the Technology Innovation Challenge Grants Program at U.S. Ed. He was the first Director of Technology Planning and Evaluation for the E-Rate program. He served as the U.S. Secretary of Education's liaison to the Corporation for National Service during the launch

of AmeriCorps. He was Deputy Director of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, prior to which he was Director of National Research Centers and Regional Laboratories at the National Institute of Education (NIE). He taught and did research in the School of Education at Clark University, and holds a Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology from SUNY Buffalo. He served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Lesotho from 1967-1969. NCTAF publications are at: [www.nctaf.org](http://www.nctaf.org)

**Karen Cator**, *Director of Educational Technology*  
[U.S. Department of Education](#)

Karen Cator is the Director of the Office of Educational Technology at the U.S. Department of Education. She has devoted her career to creating the best possible learning environments for this generation of students. Prior to joining the department, Cator directed Apple's leadership and advocacy efforts in education. In this role, she focused on the intersection of education policy and research, emerging technologies, and the reality faced by teachers, students and administrators.

Cator joined Apple in 1997 from the public education sector, most recently leading technology planning and implementation in Juneau, Alaska. She also served as Special Assistant for Telecommunications for the Lieutenant Governor of Alaska. Cator holds a Masters in school administration from the University of Oregon and Bachelors in early childhood education from Springfield College. She is the past chair of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills and has served on the several boards including the Software & Information Industry Association—Education.

**Neal Goff**, *President of the Board*  
[Association of Educational Publishers and President, Egremont Associates](#)

Neal Goff is a leader in educational publishing with more than a quarter century of experience in product development, product marketing, and business leadership in educational, consumer and business-to-business publishing. After starting his publishing career as a newspaper and magazine editor, Neal spent more than a decade at Time Inc., where he held senior positions at Time Life Books and Book-of-the-Month Club. He later became President of Simon & Schuster's direct mail division, Prentice Hall Direct; Chief Operating Officer of R.R. Bowker; and Senior Vice President of Marketing at BMG Direct. In the last decade, Neal has served as President of Scholastic Library (formerly Grolier Reference) Publishing, and then became President of Weekly Reader Publishing. Neal is

## Presenters and Panelists (cont'd)

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President of the Board of Directors of the Association of Educational Publishers and also serves on the Board of the Urban Education Exchange. In April 2011, he founded K12TeacherStore.com, a digital-only bookstore designed to serve the needs of K-12 educators.

**Shannon Holden**, *Assistant Principal Republic Middle School, and founder of [NewTeacherHelp.com](http://NewTeacherHelp.com).*

Shannon Holden is an Assistant Principal at Republic Middle School in Republic Missouri. He has been a high school and middle school teacher and administrator in North Dakota, Texas, and Missouri for 20 years. Shannon teaches classes in educational technology at Lindenwood University and Missouri State University.

In 2009, Shannon built a website called [www.newteacherhelp.com](http://www.newteacherhelp.com) to help reduce the 50% attrition rate for teachers new to the profession. Shannon has put all of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) on Facebook at <http://on.fb.me/ccssmainmenu>, which is profiled in the September 2011 issue of *Principal Leadership*. Shannon leads two professional learning communities on edWeb.net: "New Teacher Help" and "TechTools for the Classroom."

**Keith R. Krueger**, *CEO Consortium for School Networking (CoSN)*

Keith R. Krueger (CAE) is CEO of the Consortium for School Networking (CoSN), a national nonprofit organization that serves as the voice of K-12 technology leaders, especially school district CTO's, who use technology strategically to improve teaching and learning. He has extensive background in nonprofit/association management and is particularly interested in using information technologies for education, health and libraries. He received a Masters of Arts in Public Affairs from the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute at the University of Minnesota.

He serves on the Advisory Boards for eSchool News, and Scholastic Administrator Magazine, GetNetWise and Generation Y. He is a past Board Member for the Organizations Concerned about Rural Education (OCRE) and served for many years as Board Member and Treasurer of the National Committee on Technology in Education & Training (NCTET). He has been honored as an eSchool News IMPACT 30 key national leader in educational technology.

**Michelle Luhtala**, *Head Librarian New Canaan High School*

Michelle Luhtala is Department Chair of New Canaan High School (CT) Library, which won the American Association of School Librarians' (AASL) 2010 National School Library Program of the Year Award. She is an AASL board member; she serves on the Connecticut Digital Library Advisory Board and is co-chair of the CoSN Awards Committee.

Ms. Luhtala facilitates a 2,500+ member online professional learning community for school librarians called Using Emerging Technology to Improve Your Library Program at [edWeb.net](http://edWeb.net), an online professional learning network for educators, where she presents monthly webinars.

Michelle is a contributing author for two forthcoming book projects for Libraries Unlimited, one about library programming and the other about online professional development. Her articles have appeared in several school library publications. She is a regular conference presenter.

Michelle is an advocate for free-range media and Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policies in K-12 education. She blogs about this and other innovative educational practices at [Bibliotech.me](http://Bibliotech.me).

**Thomas P McCool, Ed. D.**, *President Eden Autism Services*

Dr. Thomas McCool is President/CEO of the Eden Family of Services, based in Princeton, New Jersey. From 1996 to 2005, Dr. McCool served as the Vice President of Development and Government Relations for Devereux nationally. From 1985 to 1996 Dr. McCool was the Executive Director of Devereux California with responsibility for Clinical, Residential, Recreational, and Educational/Vocational Programs for 235 developmentally disabled children and adults. Dr. McCool received a Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Leadership from Fairleigh Dickinson University's Institute for Leadership Studies in Hackensack, New Jersey, and a Masters of Education Degree from West Chester State University, West Chester, Pennsylvania.

## Presenters and Panelists (cont'd)

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**Dr. Mari Pearlman**, *Founder and President*  
[Pearlman Education Group](#)

Mari Pearlman has spent her career developing assessments, and, in particular, teacher assessments and professional development tools. She spent 26 years at Educational Testing Service, in test development, new product development, and, finally, as Senior Vice President for Higher Education. She has also worked as Senior Vice President for Education at Catapult Learning, a K-12 supplemental instruction and professional development provider. She has written extensively about assessment and professional development issues, and is currently the host of a webinar series, "Learner-Centered Leadership" on edWeb.net. She is also currently at work on a book, with Joan Snowden, on the transformational possibilities of teacher evaluation systems in public schools.

**Ilene Rosenthal**, *Founder and CEO*  
[Footsteps2Brilliance](#)

Ms. Rosenthal is the CEO and Founder of Footsteps2Brilliance, a comprehensive early learning program that uses mobile technology in order to connect school and home and expand traditional strategies for parental involvement. The curriculum emphasizes reading/language arts, mathematics, critical thinking skills and creativity. Prior to this, Ms. Rosenthal served as President of Strategic Initiatives for Achieve3000, a leader in differentiated instruction. She also co-founded Lightspan, an educational software company.

In her capacity as a lawyer, she has served as General Counsel to the Software Publishers Association (today called SIIA) and Special Assistant to the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). She also served as the General Counsel to the Government Operations Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives, and as an Assistant United States Attorney in the District of Columbia. Ms. Rosenthal received her J.D. from Georgetown University and her B.A. from Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn.

**Lisa Schmucki**, *Founder and CEO*  
[edWeb.net](#)

Lisa Schmucki is the founder and CEO of edWeb.net, a professional social network for the education community that has been adopted by educators, associations, and education companies to create online professional learning communities that have the power to transform education at all levels. Lisa has 30 years experience in educational publishing in marketing, product development, and database development. She has used the expertise acquired in her professional career, in collaboration with a great team of colleagues, to create edWeb.net — a social network that can help break down silos in education and help everyone involved in education to work more cooperatively together. Lisa has held senior marketing positions with Films Media Group, Achieve3000, MKTG Services, Peterson's Guides, Macmillan Book Clubs, and Time-Life Books. She founded Bridgepoint Marketing Services, a marketing consulting company. Lisa is a graduate of Princeton University and has a Masters Degree from the Stern School of Business at NYU.

# Participants

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**Barbara Cambridge**

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**Meg Carnes**

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Consortium for School Networking (CoSN)

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**Becky Palmer-Scott**

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**Eric Scheniger**

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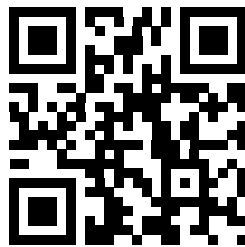
The Education Study Center

**Kathy Starks**

Librarian  
Oswego Free Academic Library



To download a copy of the report, use this QR code or go to [www.edweb.net/fimages/op/Roundtable\\_Report.pdf](http://www.edweb.net/fimages/op/Roundtable_Report.pdf)



You can continue the conversation by joining the edWeb.net Consortium on Online Communities of Practice at [www.edweb.net/consortium](http://www.edweb.net/consortium)

Thank you to Ilene Rosenthal, Founder and CEO of Footsteps2Brilliance, for hosting this event.

Thank you to Follett Software Company and MCH Strategic Data for sponsoring the event.

