TAPPED IN's After School Online Program: Teacher Professional Development on the Internet

The intended goal of this paper is to take an in-depth look at TAPPED IN's After School Online program through:

- A glance at its history and goals
- Ten hours of observation as a participant in the program
- The results of creating and moderating a mini-series of three public sessions
- The observations and opinions of several other participants and organizers in the program
- A brief discussion of how ASO has helped TAPPED IN accomplish its goals and how ASO could be improved to better serve those needs

I. History of TAPPED IN & After School Online

The Internet has enabled isolated individuals and groups reach the resources, information, and connections that would have otherwise been impossible. One such group that suffers from professional isolation is that of K-12 teachers. Teachers spend a majority of their time on the job with students in class and performing other duties, leaving little time to interact with their colleagues. Without these valuable collegial exchanges, teachers have little opportunity to discuss their teaching methods, their successes and failures, current reform issues, or even just vent their frustrations to a sympathetic ear. The K-12 school structure is a unique workplace environment that offers no private offices or cubicles. Inflexible meeting and conference schedules are compounded by innumerable tangential responsibilities ranging from detention to extracurriculars, leaving teachers to search elsewhere for the connections unavailable in their workplace (Fusco, Schank, & Schlager, 1999).

In 1997 SRI developed a plan for solving this problem by harnessing the power of the Internet,

SRI's Vision for Tapped In

A place where teachers with diverse interests, skills, and backgroungs can:

- meet and learn from one another at any time
- be exposed to a variety of education reform concepts and approaches
- find high-quality resources and contribute those that they find useful

(Schank & Schlager, 1997)

and keeping in mind the needs of teachers and restrictions on their time and resources. SRI hypothesized that creating an online community of practice would help bring teachers to the wide array of resources and colleagues eluding them in their workplaces (Fusco, Schank, & Schlager, 1999). TAPPED IN was to become a "self-sustaining Teacher Professional Development community in an on-line environment" that

would allow teachers to discuss and get involved in current reform issues (Schank & Schlager, 1997).

SRI had a number of desired goals for their new professional development community. First, TAPPED IN would break the mold of normal professional development efforts by allowing free, 24-hour access to colleagues, discussions, and resources. It was hoped that the design, similar to a conference center, would encourage, "high-quality, professionally relevant discourse" (Schank & Schlager, 1997; Fenton, Fusco, Schank, & Schlager, 1999). By allowing teachers membership in a community of like-minded peers and providing them with close connections to more powerful organizations, it was hoped that members would also band together to build momentum behind reform issues and create a noticeable impact not only in their localities, but across the country (Fusco, Schank, & Schlager, 1999).

On a smaller scale, TAPPED IN would aid teachers in applying the latest technologies and research findings to their classrooms (Schank & Schlager, 1997). By simply getting involved in

an online community, TAPPED IN members would gain a greater awareness of the affordances of such a technology, and become representatives for a new generation of teachers and learners. As explained in their article, Cornerstones for an On-Line Community of Education Professionals, Mark Schlager, Judith Fusco, and Patricia Schank explain that by creating such an environment, "teachers in our community will be better prepared to select and employ emerging technologies effectively to support their own professional growth as well as the learning of their students." In order to help accomplish these goals and introduce members to the community, TAPPED IN created a program called After School Online that would host regular (weekly, monthly, etc.) discussions lead by volunteer moderators, and open to the community.

The first After School Online session began shortly after the creation of TAPPED IN in 1997 (SRI International, 2001b). Focused discussions, open to all TI members, would be offered on topics of interest to sections of the TI population. Early sessions happened with far less frequency than at present, with only a few sessions spread out over the course of the year. The first ASO discussions with transcripts on record focused on issues such as how to use TI for discussions, and teacher/administrator relationships. In 1998 ASO began to build momentum, gaining a stronger audience base and finding numerous volunteer moderators. Early in the year, sessions focused on familiarizing TI members with the environment and online discussion process. By the end of 1998 ASO had formed into an organized system comparable to the ASO of today.

ASO is currently entering its fifth year of existence and has blossomed into an entity of its own within the TAPPED IN environment. ASO is coordinated by the TAPPED IN Help desk and

utilizes several online methods of advertising and scheduling. TAPPED IN publishes a monthly calendar of ASO activities and also utilizes an e-mail listserv open to the entire TI community (SRI International, 2002a). Members of the "MeetMe" e-mail group receive weekly postings about upcoming events and planned ASO sessions. ASO goers also have the option to subscribe to the ASO mail group, which is used for questions and comments regarding discussions and provides further resources about the topics of various conversations.

ASO discussions are researched, scheduled, and lead by volunteer moderators. Moderators are simply members of TAPPED IN who have a special interest or knowledge of a particular issue who would like to lead a discussion. Most often moderators are self-selected and approach a member of the TI help desk about their idea for a discussion. Moderators may also be approached by help desk staff for their knowledge on a particular topic of interest to the TI community, or to elaborate on topics mentioned during other ASO discussions (Berquist, 2001a). Any member of the TI community is also able to propose a topic through TI's online topic submission form (SRI International, 2001c). Proposals must contain not only the planned topic, but also resources (such as citations or websites) and discussion ideas in order to ensure a substantive discussion. Proposals also serve the purpose of gathering information about the goals of the session, what members can expect to learn by attending, and a small professional biography of the aspirant moderator.

ASO was created to be a flexible resource, and has thus been able to accomplish a variety of tasks. Sessions have been used for everything from passing around websites for use in

curriculum, to teaching software, to planning projects across distance. While constant additions and changes take place each week, some of these current purposes are briefly described below.

Sharing Curriculum and Teaching Resources

The most popular use of ASO is the gathering of teachers to share resources related to teaching and curriculum planning. Regularly occurring sessions such as the Social Studies Forum, K-3 Resources, and 7-12 Science Teacher Forum are moderated by veteran teachers who are experienced in integrating new technologies and practices into their classrooms. The moderators, as well as session attendees, bring with them URLs for relevant websites, ideas for student activities, and ways to incorporate current events and trends into daily lessons.

Organizational Matters & Planning

After School Online sessions can also call upon the experience, opinions, and connections of the community by holding public organizational and planning sessions. The Blanket the World with Peace project has been holding ASO sessions for several months now, incorporating the voices of a diverse group of TI members into their funding, development, design, and deployment strategies. ASO moderators can also hold organizational meetings with members in order to touch base with the needs of the community. For example, the Alternative/Correctional Education Forum periodically asks members to join a session and express related issues and ideas for upcoming discussions.

Training

When a skill, such as using a new piece of software, generally interests the TI community, public training sessions are held as part of the ASO schedule. Creating Virtual Field Trips Using TourMaker Software is one regularly occurring session that allows members who have downloaded this software to engage in free step-by-step online training lead by a member of the TourMaker training staff.

Becoming Familiar With the Environment

TAPPED IN Tours and Tips is a unique ASO session that invites new members of TAPPED IN to join other novices in a guided exploration of the TI environment. Experienced members are also invited and encouraged to attend, bringing along questions and suggestions.

Topical/Research Discussions

ASO is a very successful medium for holding discussions about specific topics and gathering data and opinions about current research. In the PaArts:FluidArts discussion, moderator Deborah Phelan plans on discussing the work she and other researchers have done regarding arts, culture, and media. During the session attendees will have an opportunity to learn about the products of the research and their implications on education. One session of the Social Studies Forum focusing on MIT's Young Historians project involved TAPPED IN members in the early development phases of the project. Young Historians researchers brought in concerns and questions about the needs of Social Studies teachers as they would pertain to the project.

Virtual Office Hours

National organizations have taken advantage of the ASO forum by creating virtual office hours occurring regularly on the TI calendar. The National Board Certification Discussion Group holds sessions allowing, "National Board candidates, certified teachers, and future candidates are invited to join Gayle Britt for a discussion of resources, needs, and any questions...(SRI International, 2002b)." These sessions connect peers navigating the same path towards certification providing answers and support that would otherwise be difficult to afford on an individual basis.

Perhaps the most attractive quality of the ASO program is the great variety of content matter spanned by the sessions. Most broad subject areas, including Math, Science, Language Arts, Elementary, Social Studies, etc. have their own regular slot reserved on the ASO calendar. Even the more specialized areas of education, such at Alternative/Correctional Education, and Library/Media have monthly time slots reserved. Even more interesting than the breadth of the content that ASO sessions cover are the depths that each individual session can reach.

Under the main headings of Math, Science, or Social Studies, moderators choose rich and

Recent ASO Topics

- Euro Language: Keypals Format for student exchange
- Tech in the Classroom: Internet Safety
- 7-12 Science Teacher Forum: Evolutionary Concepts
- Administrator's Corner: Leading During Crisis
- Science Teacher Forum: Astrobiology
- Benkyoukai: Online Japanese Course

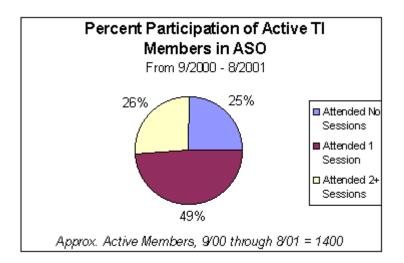
(SRI International, 2002b)

complex sub-topics interesting enough to attract an hour worth of busy teachers' time. Recently seventh through twelfth grade science teachers have had the opportunity to engage in discussions about evolution, creationism, astrobiology, nuclear chemistry, Spectroscopy and the Doppler effect, and Kepler's laws. Language arts teachers were invited to engage in an in

depth conversation about Greek Mythology that spanned two weeks worth of ASO session. K-8 Science teachers had the opportunity to participate in a "Geology Ask-a-scientist" session, as well as a discussion about Science Process Skills. Administrators were also given several options for interesting and relevant discourse in the ASO room during the last several months, covering topics such as Leading During Crisis, and answering the question, "Why Become an Administrator?"

Because of it's commitment to such a flexible set of purposes and diverse population of teachers, the ASO program has continued to grow as a successful element of the TAPPED IN community. As of November 13, 2001, TAPPED IN had grown to over 14,000 members, with approximately 1400 of those members currently being active participants in the community (SRI International, 2001d; Berquist, 2001b). As illustrated in Chart 1, of the members active during the year starting in September, 2000 and ending in August, 2001, 75% attended at least one ASO session with approximately 26% of those members attending two or more sessions (Fusco, 2001). During the same time span, 279 different ASO sessions were held, showing a 284% increase over the number of sessions offered in the 1999-2000 year (Fusco, 2001). Also, with an average of ten members attending each ASO event, it is obvious that the ASO program provides one of the greatest draws to the TAPPED IN environment (Fusco, 2001).

Chart 1.



II. ASO – What it's like for a participant

To assess ASO from the standpoint of a participant, I set out to become one of the thousand ASO users, and joined in just over ten hours worth of ASO discussions from a variety of disciplines, which were held for a variety of purposes. I wanted to get a sense of what was possible with the medium, how it was being used, its strengths and weaknesses, and what makes such a program successful. I chose the sessions carefully in order to cross boundaries of content, audience, purpose, and recurrence. A complete tabular listing of the sessions I attended is available in Appendix A. The sessions I attended spanned four of the six purposes described above: Sharing Resources, Organizational Matters/Planning, Teaching new concepts, and Discussion. I have chosen one or two examples of each type to illustrate what they can accomplish, and hurdles to reaching those goals.

Session Purposes: Sharing Curriculum and Teaching Resources

The Social Studies Forum is a highly successful weekly/semimonthly session that gathers Social Studies and History Teachers for discussions under the moderation of decorated and multitalented veteran teacher, Michael Hutchison. Michael currently teaches Social Studies at Lincoln High School in Vincennes, Indiana, instructs part-time at Vincennes University, and is a faculty member of Connected University (Hutchison, 2001a). Michael has also been the recipient of numerous awards including the 2002: Indiana Computer Educators, "Teacher of the Year." Michael has been a TAPPED IN member for three years and donates his time not only to moderating ASO sessions, but also the TI help desk.

I chose to attend three Social Studies forums as part of this study in order to observe how sessions with the same goals and subject area can differ from discussion to discussion. My first Social Studies Forum experience was in the "Sports In History" discussion, which ironically coincided with one of the baseball season's playoff games. The discussion jumped back and forth between sports and history, and sports and the present, moving from website projections about minorities and women in sports, to roars and cheers over strikes and runs. Though I am not an avid baseball fan, the session was enjoyable and informative. Without the major distraction of a "big game" I believe the session could have provided more resources with better discussion on how to incorporate them.

My second experience in the Social Studies Forum was centered on the topic, "Teaching About the American Presidency." This session remained on task throughout the hour, offering up an extensive list of resources from Michael, as well as a participant. Michael introduced an award-

winning project about the American Presidency he and his students created several years prior, and explained how the resources gathered through his project could be used by teachers today. All participants seemed enthralled with the work, and eventually began to share resources of their own. One participant, a technology trainer, took the floor for the last part of the session, projecting a useful collection of sites to the group, which would also be recorded in the session's transcript for future access. This experience differed greatly from the previous in that the lack of distraction created a captive audience for the wealth of resources presented.

My final observation of the Social Studies Forum took place during the "Social Studies and Special Education" discussion. This session's attendance showed somewhat of an increase over the past two I observed, possibly, as Michael had remarked, because the nation was starting to heal from the recent national tragedy, and possibly because of the necessity of alternative resources in the field of Special Education. Participants in this discussion seemed to have a deeply vested interest in the field of Special Education, and were therefore very willing to share their opinions and strategies in the interest of helping others succeed in the field. Though this discussion came up with a smaller number of resources, each of those that were introduced were discussed in depth.

Another interesting experience I had with a resource sharing session occurred in the Euro Language Teacher Forum's discussion on "Using Online Resources in an ESL/EFL Classroom." Moderator, Philip Benz, an English Teacher in the Ardeche region of central France, drew upon his international connections and experiences to create an interesting dynamic among the diverse group. Philip used the session to introduce one type of resource, and spent the hour walking us

through the process and explaining its implications in the classroom. This seemed like an effective way to share one particular resource that had proven successful in other situations, and give participants a running start into using it in their own classrooms.

Overall, the resource sharing sessions usually draw a diverse crowd of highly dedicated and knowledgeable teachers and education professionals. The value of the sessions can usually be measured in either the breadth or depth of resources introduced, or a good balance of the two. The discussion flowing around these resources is also incredibly valuable for less experienced or technophobic teachers.

Session Purposes: Training

Upon joining the "Creating Virtual Field Trips with Virtual Field Trips Software" discussion, I immediately entered into a structured lesson on how to use the software, step-by-step. Kim Foley, a researcher working for the Virtual Field Trips site, began the session by first making sure all of the attendants had downloaded and installed the software properly, and immediately dove into a lesson she had prepared complete with prearranged content, graphics, and website links. To start, Kim familiarized us with the software interface, and helped guide us through the process of inserting the various elements of a virtual field trip into the software. Kim made especially clever use of the ASO whiteboard (where selectable text can be posted by anyone in the room) by posting text content and web links before the lesson started. With the ease of copying and pasting elements rather than typing in our own, the session ran much more efficiently and participants came out with a homogenous product, where errors would be easy to find by a remote teacher. Though the session was laced with advertisement and the full

capabilities of the software weren't available without purchasing it, the training session proved to be very successful. Being able to try out a new type of software and receive free training is a rare opportunity for most busy educators. This particular session was also useful for conveying the array of possibilities of the TAPPED IN medium when some creativity and ingenuity is thrown in.

My encounter with the "WebQuests for Global Understanding" was a completely different type of training experience, providing a useful and constructive approach to creating a WebQuest. During this discussion several well-designed WebQuests were shown, while the authors explained how the pieced together the design and pedagogical strategies. On WebQuest in particular was projected and subjected to the participants' review. This type of discussion helped participants understand the kind of consideration needed in creating a WebQuest, how to integrate WebQuests into the classroom, and asked them to think critically about how to improve an existing WebQuest. Rather than using a direct teaching method, moderator Bernie Dodge, Professor of Educational Technology at San Diego State University, allows participants to learn by becoming immersed in the process of design, revision, and implementation.

Though training sessions are not the most common on the ASO calendar, they certainly hold a great deal of potential for teaching new concepts and technologies across distance. The examples above illustrate effective ways that creative and innovative educators have utilized the popularity and accessibility of ASO and the flexibility of the TI medium to teach to a large audience. The examples of direct and indirect training shown above only touch upon the possibilities of the

medium. By expanding its collection of training sessions, ASO has the potential to meet a larger

pool of common needs.

Session Purpose: Organizational Matters & Planning

Anna Martin, South Carolina high school art teacher and chair of the Electronic Media Interest

Group of the NAEA, brought together a few members of the team helping plan the Blanket the

World with Peace Project along with some general members of TI to discuss funding resources,

strategies, and the draft of their grant proposal. This virtual meeting enabled project members

from across the country to share the progress they have made on various pieces of the project,

and throw out a general request for advice regarding grant opportunities. Team members

projected perspective grants as well as the blurbs they put together for the cover letter and

beginnings of a grant proposal. New partnerships were also discussed, and at the end of the

discussion, tasks were reassigned, new members were added, and the project moved forward

with no formal face-to-face meeting.

With a clear goal in mind, the ASO environment can be an ideal place for holding open meetings

where new opinions and outside help is needed and appreciated. Because of the access to such a

wide variety of experts and connections, ASO is a great venue for not only organizing and

planning new projects, but helping to build momentum behind them through advertising and

acquiring new and enthusiastic volunteers.

Session Purposes: Topical/Research Discussion

My first discussion-oriented ASO session was led by Bill Williams, a Technology Coordinator and Science teacher at Richmond Hill High School, as part of the Technology in the Classroom Forum. The discussion focused on online professional development, and attracted a large crowd of current online professional development researchers and enthusiasts. The large discussion, with approximately fourteen participants, began by focusing on professional associations, but often broke down into several tangential conversations. Among the side conversations participants discussed their own experiences with online professional development through varying types of media, and made recommendations to each other regarding the effectiveness of each type. Interestingly participants stayed on topic throughout the variety of subthreads they had to watch scroll by, reflecting the sort of skills that experienced members develop over the course of their membership in TAPPED IN. Overall a good bit of information was exchanged and discussed, though not in an entirely organized manner.

A second discussion-based session I took part in was based on the research of a correctional educator and guest of TAPPED IN. TAPPED IN help staff member BJ Berquist led the discussion entitled "Web Access for Students in Alt/Correctional Programs" inviting the researcher to describe his project and ideas. During the discussion, the researcher did not simply lecture about his work, but asked for advice, suggestions, and even called for beta testers.

These types of sessions in ASO are somewhat infrequent, but hold the potential to be an important linkage between researchers and the practicing population, as well as serving as a place where teachers can share common experiences and advice about elements of the profession that happen beyond the classroom.

After gathering data through my own experiences, I turned to the TAPPED IN community to find their take on After School Online. Utilizing the MeetMe listserv, which distributes e-mail to self-selected ASO participants, I passed out a small questionnaire asking for replies to the following questions:

- 1. Which After School Online Sessions do you attend (if any)?
- 2. For what purposes do you visit After School Online sessions?
- 3. What are the pros and cons of After School Online?
- 4. What other types of professional development do you engage in? (in-service days, workshops, etc.)
- 5. Will you allow your responses to this survey to be included in the research report?

I received five responses, each answering yes to question five, allowing their answers to be included in this paper. The five respondents collectively attend the Tech Coordinators Forum,

"The conversations are more substantive and foused than ordinary chat room discussions."

(Catherine Martinez, 2001)

Arts-related discussions, Tech In the Classroom, 7-12 Science Teachers Forum, Social Studies Forum, Water Cooler Confab, Web-Tools, Targeting Librarians, K-3

Resources, and WebQuests, representing their above-average enthusiasm towards the program.

Respondents cited a variety of purposes for their visits, mentioning keeping in touch with colleagues, obtaining and sharing curriculum resources, getting new ideas for classes, and keeping abreast of new technologies, as their most significant motivational factors. This motivation for teaching excellence also seems to carry over into the respondents' participation in

other professional development endeavors, including other online sources like Teachers.net and Connected Classroom, and face-to-face events such as graduate study, in-school/after-school workshops, in-service days, and professional meetings and conferences.

Though these members appreciate the positive aspects of ASO, even the most dedicated participants find fault with a few parts of the ASO system. On the positive side, respondents to

"The only negative I see is that it makes things difficult for those who have other duties (coaching, grad school, etc.) to make it to the sessions."

(Michael Hutichison, 2001)

the survey listed: decreased teacher isolation, convenience of meeting from home, substantive conversations, sense of community, bridging distance, variety of topics,

knowledgeable moderators, and cost-free nature of the program as the pros of ASO sessions.

Cons mentioned by the respondents were far less common than the pros, but included the sometimes-slow pace of discussions, necessary level "techno-savvy" to get involved, timing issues, and lack of continuing education credits.

As a participant in the ASO program, I feel like I have walked away with a wealth of knowledge, resources, skills, and lasting professional friendships. The great level of variety and depth of conversations I engaged in surpassed my expectations and has convinced me to continue my participation in the sessions beyond the life of my research. As a participant I always felt as though my opinion was respected and embraced, and that my needs and questions were always important to the group. Though I was disappointed at times when sessions lost focus, were scheduled during a time I was unavailable, or became too saturated to follow, I agree with the pros set forth by the various participants above. I feel that ASO is an excellent opportunity to

meet and share a multiplicity of resources and ideas with new colleagues beyond the boundaries of isolation, distance, and time.

III. ASO – What it's like for a moderator

After learning about the After School Online program through the lens of a participant, I changed directions, and repositioned myself as an ASO moderator. Through my initial participation experiences, I assessed much of the promise of ASO and decided to create a few sessions aimed at fulfilling that potential. I chose to form a mini-series of three sessions, all growing out of a common purpose: "Bridging the Gap Between Educational Research and Practice." These topical/research discussion based sessions would bring in expert faculty and student researchers from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, as well as TAPPED IN members interested in influencing and learning about cutting edge research.

During my first scheduled session, I had the luck of scheduling Dr. Chris Dede of the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a segment of his large entourage of graduate student researchers to join me in discussing one of their current projects. Dr. Dede, a TAPPED IN veteran and virtual environment user-extraordinaire not only brought in his research knowledge about Teacher Retention and New Technology, but also his TI savvy. As the conversation moved along smoothly and the participants started opening tangential threads of discussion, Dr. Dede offered up virtual coffee and champagne to the guests, played with some virtual pets, and even warmed the place up with a virtual fire. Though these interactive objects worked to liven up the late-evening session and piqued the curiosity of some newcomers to the environment, they also

tended to distract participants from staying on topic, and added an extra challenge for me as the moderator. I must say that I was glad to be confronted with such a trial, because distractions and participants losing focus are the first hurdles all moderators will encounter.

The second session in the series focused on Online Teacher Professional Development, and was joined by Harvard Graduate School of Education professor and Wide World researcher, Dr. Martha Stone Wiske. Because of Dr. Wiske's popular work on the teaching framework, Teaching for Understanding, this session drew quite a crowd, reaching up to about fifteen participants at one point. This large group presented me with the challenge of keeping everyone focused on the discussion topic, responding to each individual's questions, bringing the group back on task when the conversation began to fray, and periodically summarize the conversation to move things along and catch up sidetracked participants. Though the average ASO session only consists of ten participants, more popular sessions can reach as many as thirty one members, leading to chaotic and less balanced discussions.

The third session, held in conjunction with Michael Hutchison's Social Studies Forum, was joined by a team of researchers from MIT lead by Dr. Shigeru Miyagawa. This session, originally scheduled to take place in the After School Online room, was moved into the Cafe at the last moment, possibly accounting for the small attendance the session received. After having such a large showing at the previous session, it was quite challenging to create an interesting dialogue with just a few people from outside the research project. Also, one key member of the research team was unable to attend the discussion as planned, leaving myself and other members to field questions, which would have been best directed to the absent researcher. As the

discussion got moving, one of the participants in the discussion also became impatient and very negative, demanding that his questions be answered, and gave abrasive responses to the researchers' comments. Though the session brought a few small obstacles, it yielded a productive and interested conversation about how the MIT research could be improved upon and incorporated into some Social Studies Classrooms.

In total, my experience as a moderator was very fun and productive, though stressful at times. I first found it difficult to coordinate and fit discussions into the busy schedules of Harvard and MIT faculty and graduate students, and schedule the sessions when a good audience of TI members would be available. Oftentimes just when I'd find a slot that worked for everyone on the research team, I would realize that other popular ASO sessions were taking place, lessening my chances of finding an audience. Also, several of the researchers were unfamiliar with the TAPPED IN interface, necessitating some outside training.

As a moderator I feel that I learned a great deal about the responsibility and expertise required by the position, giving me a renewed respect for those who continue to volunteer their time week

"The moderator not only needs to be knowledgeable in the topic, but also needs to have the skills to encourage all participants to become actively engaged in the discussion."

(BJ Berquist, 2001)

after week. In my opinion, the learning of the moderator far exceeds that of the participants in any session. Moderators are not only taking away new opinions and resources from

their audience, but continue to learn to master human interaction. Beyond the intelligence and technological know-how, moderators must also possess a caring and confident demeanor to help their participants feel comfortable, respected, and important to the discussion.

IV. Conclusion

The After School Online program in TAPPED IN has been a major factor in accomplishing SRI's initial goals for the professional development community. Part of SRI's primary vision for TAPPED IN included exposing educators to a variety of reform concepts and approaches, and sharing high-quality resources (Schank & Schlager, 1997). The vast assortment of topics and purposes offered on the ASO calendar, and the diverse population attending these sessions on a regular basis provides teachers with countless options for contact with reform issues. Also, the caliber and expertise of the discussion moderators always ensures highly valuable and relevant resources.

The ASO program also gives us a glimpse at how the Internet can effectively serve the professional development needs of isolated populations. As Ron Owston Describes in Making the Link: Teacher Professional Development on the Internet, one of the great affordances of online communities is, "... the possibility for long-term deep exploration of problems and issues affecting your practice." The ASO program provides this by creating a venue where topics can be revisited over time. Research also suggests that finding this sustained interaction in a community of professional colleagues is key teachers' success in implementing new practices (Kozma & Schank, 1998).

Though ASO has already been successful at serving the needs of thousands of teachers, a larger audience could be reached by creating some advertising efforts. At present, TAPPED IN has relied on strict word-of-mouth policy for getting word out about its services. However, with the current success and potential for growth, many more teachers could benefit from membership in the environment, bringing even more resources and diverse expertise along with them.

Another possibility for improving ASO's service to teachers would be teaming up with state organizations or universities that would recognize attendance at ASO sessions as hours towards Continuing Education Units. Many teachers with limited time opt for professional development opportunities that also fulfill state certification requirements, so incorporating CEU credit into the program would aid teachers looking for a convenient, flexible method of meeting state obligations.

Overall I consider my experience getting involved with the ASO program to be an extremely positive and enlightening one. The success of the program inspires me to get involved with future online teacher professional development opportunities. ASO's success also suggests a new trend to be followed by teacher professional development in the coming years, as technologies become more ubiquitous and techno-anxiety subsides.

Appendix A. Sessions Attended as a Participant

Session Name	Content Area	Topic of Discussion	Moderator	Purpose of Session	Recurrence
ArtSites: Blanket the World with Peace Project	Multidisciplinary, Arts Education	Creating an online quilt of interdisc. Multimedia contributions; Lesson Plans relating to project	Anna Martin	Organizational matters relating to project, Funding, grant proposals	Monthly
Social Studies Forum 7-12 Science Teacher Forum	Social Studies, History HS/MS Science	Sports in History Creationist Arguments	Michael Hutchison Bill Wilson	Sharing resources (websites, etc.) Sharing ideas, resources, tech.	Semi- monthly Semi- monthly
Euro Language Teachers Forum	Foreign Language	Using online resources in an ESL/EFL classroom	Phil Benz	in classroom Sharing resources and ideas	Weekly
Targeting Librarians! Online Reference Tools	Research, Library	Identifying good web-based reference sources and how to use them	Lesley Farmer	Sharing resources and methods	Monthly
Virtual Field Trips	Multidisciplinary, Technology in Education	Creating virtual field trips with Virtual Field Trips Software	Kim Foley	Software training, marketing, software sales	Monthly
Social Studies Forum	Social Studies, History	Teaching about the American Presidency	Michael Hutchison	Sharing resources, curriculum ideas	Semi- monthly
Tech in the Classroom: Professional Development	Technology in Education	Online Professional Development	Donna Hendry	Discussing experiences, Introduce Prof. Assoc. websites & resources	Semi- monthly
Social Studies Forum	Social Studies, History	Social Studies and Special Education	Michael Hutchison	Sharing resources, curriculum ideas	Semi- monthly
Alternative / Correctional Education	Multidisciplinary, Correctional and Alternative Ed.	Correctional Education Web Pages – Web access for students in Alt/Correctional programs	BJ Berquist	Discuss current strategies for integrating the web safely into these environments	Monthly
WebQuests for Global Understanding	History, Social Studies, World Cultures	Helping students understand culture, conflict, and creating peace in the wake of the events of 9-11 through webquests	Bernie Dodge	Discuss how to use and create webquests, and their advantages	Monthly

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