



**By Kara Burritt**

*Kara Burritt is the Manager of Programs and Communications with the World Wide Workshop, the creators of Globaloria, where she enjoys sharing success stories of teachers and students who are strengthening STEM skills through game design.*

# Proven Professional Development Tips from Globaloria

**P**encils, paper, and books were yesterday's classroom tools. Today students have computers, tablets, and interactive media at their fingertips. Teachers are faced not only with rapidly changing learning tools, but also the evolution of learning itself. How do we train educators whose roles are being reoriented in the blended-learning classroom?

Manor ISD middle school teacher Laurie Cohen wondered as much when she signed on to teach Globaloria, an educational program that uses an online game-design curriculum, digital learning platform, social networking, and industry-standard programming tools to teach STEM skills and digital literacy. Though Cohen specializes in teaching students to use technology, the format of Globaloria was new to her. "I hadn't ever taught an online course," she says. "If students are given the access to technology, they have the ability to really navigate their way through it." Cohen also had no background in coding or programming when she took on this challenge.

Digital learning innovations, like Globaloria, require teachers to understand how to use new technologies and integrate them effectively into the classroom. With the pace at which the ed tech field evolves, teachers essentially become co-learners with their students, and traditional professional development—a discrete period of training—becomes insufficient for ongoing skills development.

Globaloria, which has served over 7,000 students across the country, and 800 in Texas this year, has developed a professional development system that empowers even technology novices to be agile teachers in a blended learning

classroom. Globaloria is designed for cross-curricular infusion of STEM and computing through game design. It is integrated in classes from Biology to Spanish to reinforce content knowledge as students invent, design, program, and publish educational web games. To prepare instructors, Globaloria offers year-long professional development in a high-impact, self-sustaining way—combining onsite and online training with on-demand expert and networked peer support. The result is that any educator is empowered to successfully transform the classroom into a dynamic, STEM-focused, digital learning lab.

## In-Person Training

Every summer, for four days, educators engage in an intensive Globaloria Academy where they learn first to program web games themselves, and then to use those tools for leading a blended-learning classroom. As teachers gain experience in the program, training needs decrease. Returning instructors are trained on updates to the Globaloria platform and provided targeted opportunities to expand their skills. Veteran teachers of two years or more are eligible to become Globaloria mentors and receive additional training to orient them to this role. All educators are encouraged and supported to self-learn and share best practices.

However, in-person training is just one part of the PD puzzle. "It helped ease some of my concerns," reflects Cohen. "I knew that I could handle the Globaloria platform, but was still not convinced how well I could do with [coding]."

## Virtual Support

To reinforce the onsite training and address questions that may arise in the live blended classroom, teachers attend monthly virtual webinars, participate in a dynamic educators' social learning network, and are given access to hundreds of online tutorials. And at any time, teachers can consult a live Help Desk—which Cohen uses to troubleshoot programming problems. "If a teacher is having difficulty, there are so many avenues for her to get help," she says.

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Globaloria teachers are matched with experienced inservice Globaloria teachers who provide guidance, share best practices, and elevate issues. This system makes ongoing professional development self-sustaining

become self-learners—making training self-sustaining.

“Your knowledge of technology does not have to be there,” says Cohen. “What has to be there is a willingness to learn with your students.” ●

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These centralized resources support teachers at each step of the curriculum, giving them the tools to effectively guide student learning and expand their own expertise.

### Peer Networking and Mentoring

Also integral to the Globaloria professional development model is a mentor program in which first-year

within the community.

### The New Professional Development

Unless we position teachers as students themselves, professional development in the digital learning environment will lose relevancy. A blend of in-person training, virtual support, and peer collaboration and mentoring can meet ongoing training needs and elevate teachers to

**Some call it a robot.  
We call it a motivator.**



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