Even as online learning becomes more and more integrated in education, we continue to struggle with the challenge of creating interactive learning communities in the online learning experience. One way to meet that challenge is to incorporate synchronous learning environments with IP video and audio in a blended technology approach to creating a complete educational experience for distance learners. However, this solution brings its own challenges – those of cost, learning curves, teacher adoption and student satisfaction.

The Community for Advancement of Partnerships in Education (CAPE) is a consortium of over 100 mostly small to medium-sized colleges, universities, k-12 schools, libraries and community organizations located primarily in Pennsylvania. CAPE created a model for partnering member schools to share the expense of licensing an interactive online learning environment, Learnlinc®, so as to support the early adopters at an affordable cost. The partnership also allowed participating schools to share lessons learned from the experience in the areas of technical support, instructional design and best practices in the environment. The model was then applied and supported through a pilot originally called OLIVE for Online Learning in an Interactive Video Environment.

The pilot was conducted in two phases. Participants in the first phase used the environment from January through May of 2003. These participants included one K-12 school district, three community colleges, three four-year colleges, a medical school and a graduate school. CAPE partnered with CyberGrad, Inc, the ASP distributing Learnlinc, to provide training, technical and instructional design support for participating teachers/presenters and orientation for students/participants. Data was collected through pre- and post-survey instruments, online meetings, conversations and email correspondence. Trainings were conducted both in person and online.

Lessons learned from the first phase of the pilot were put into practice in OLIVE: Phase II, conducted from June through August, 2003. Four of the participants in the first phase of the pilot continued use in the second phase. The Learnlinc environment was used to teach for-credit undergraduate and graduate classes, professional development and continuing education short courses. Phase II focused on testing proposed instructional design and best practices and in streamlining and refining technical set-up and support procedures. Training, instructional design consultation,
technical support and student orientation was transferred primarily to CAPE to provide as a member benefit. Again, pre- and post-surveys were administered and meetings and conversations were held throughout the second phase to monitor progress and problems.

Data from the surveys and from transcripts of meetings, conversations and correspondence was compiled and analyzed to share with all CAPE member institutions and will be discussed during this presentation. Lessons learned from the first and second phase of the OLVE pilot project informed strategies for assisting faculty adoption of new technology and increasing student satisfaction in online learning that will also be shared.

The model for shared-cost licensing was so successful that it continues with four schools participating in the fall semester of 2003. Two high schools are using the environment to share the cost of offering a college-level Japanese course to their students online. The shared-cost model is being applied to both the online environment and the Japanese faculty cost. The model for partnering for shared-cost access to new technology is being replicated with other technologies as well.

The results of using the real-time interactive capability in the synchronous learning environment enhanced by IP audio and video varied somewhat according to the user and the application but indications from data collected are that, overall, the online learning experience was enhanced for both the teacher and the student. The factors contributing to the level of satisfaction will be discussed in this presentation.

Using the power of partnerships to reduce cost and support teachers who are early adopters of technology is a model that can be replicated by schools now facing the same challenges as CAPE member institutions. As a result of the partnerships facilitated by CAPE, a community of learning for faculty teaching in the environment is emerging as more experienced users share lessons-learned with newcomers and a database of best practices, instructional design tips and technical troubleshooting hints has been compiled. This community of learning can be expanded to include other schools interested in using synchronous online learning environments.