



## ***Educational Program Evaluation***

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### ***PTPD Project***

#### ***Formative Findings December 2006 – February 2007***

The Partnership for Technology Professional Development (PTPD) was funded by the Massachusetts Department of Education (MA DoE) to offer six online professional development courses for Massachusetts' teachers and administrators through three providers: The Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), The Massachusetts Elementary School Principals Association (MESPA), and Virtual High School (VHS). Each provider made two classes available to PTPD participants through the MA DoE's MassONE system. The MA DoE supervised the first registration period, and the plan was to invite at least 20 people to take each course. It was not possible to find 20 people for some courses, while others had many more than 20 people who wanted to enroll. After the initial registration period, 96 people actually were enrolled and agreed to take the first session of classes. These classes, along with the number of students in each are as follows:

- Teacher Tech: Digital Media in the Classroom, n = 18
- UDL in the General Education Curriculum, n = 17
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literacy Skills for Teachers, n = 15
- Leadership for the 21st Century: Teaching, Learning, and Technology, n = 11
- Principles of Curriculum Design, n = 18
- Creating Assessments Using Online Tools, n = 17

Sun Associates was contracted to conduct an external evaluation of the project. By design, this evaluation is to include data collection and both summative and formative reporting. Accordingly, during the first session courses, evaluators from Sun Associates administered a pre-class survey which was posted on each of the six class websites. In addition, the evaluators attended face-to-face sessions conducted for the four hybrid classes, "lurked" in the online activities of all the classes, and interviewed, by email, non-persistent students from the classes, as well as instructors and administrators of the courses. During the last week of class, a post-class survey, again through the MassONE class websites, was administered to all persistent PTPD class participants. Sun Associates evaluators planned three focus groups, one was held on Feb. 9<sup>th</sup> during the final face-to-face session of the Curriculum Design course, the second was held on Feb. 13<sup>th</sup> during the final iVocalize synchronous session of the UDL course, and the last was held at the face-to-face meeting for all Worcester PTPD participants on March 14<sup>th</sup>. Susan Hargrave of the MA DoE also graciously shared the data she had collected from email interviews of students from the UDL class. All of the data collected to this point is reflected in the following report.

Some general findings from the pre-class survey: (n = 86, or a calculated response rate of 90%)

71% of students were new to online learning or had taken only one or two online classes, and slightly less, 64%, had not used MassONE before; however, 91% felt they had the necessary technical skills to take an online course, and a large majority, 86%, had DSL or Cable access to the Internet. While some students expressed some concern about using MassONE, many were excited about the opportunity to use MassONE to take an online course for professional development.

There were 60 respondents to the post-class survey, which represented a response rate of 67%. Since the class websites were not available to students within a few days of the end of classes, some students were unable to respond to the post-class survey. The post-class survey results indicated that the instructors for all of the courses were considered knowledgeable and responsive to the students, and a vast majority, 88%, would strongly recommend the class they took to a colleague. As they had predicted in the Pre-Class Survey, the majority, 83%, students, felt they were technically able to navigate through MassONE to complete their course requirements. Slightly fewer students, 78%, found MassONE to be “always reliable and available for access to my PTPD course”. It may also be important to note, since some students had no access to the Internet except from school, that while 88% found access to the Internet from home always available, only 77% found access to the Internet from school to be always available.

It is apparent to the evaluators that the first session of PTPD courses were perceived as valuable to the participants, worth the effort by the administrators, and gratifying by the course instructors. Although there were some administration issues around class registration, and some technical problems encountered both by the faculty and the students, no one seemed to feel these issues were insurmountable, and plans are underway to improve the administration of the second session courses.

While many of the students in the PTPD classes complained about the difficulty in attending face-to-face sessions for their courses, the majority felt it was a worthwhile activity, and expressed positive reactions to the sessions. While CAST’s iVocalize sessions were more convenient than actual face-to-face sessions, the technology was an inhibitor for some students. All in all, the effort to bring students together, for at least one face-to-face session, seems to outweigh all negative aspects of bringing people together. The instructors and support personnel, such as technical staff from MassONE and CAST staff members for the iVocalize and face-to-face sessions, made every possible effort to ensure that the students’ experience was positive and enjoyable

The teachers and administrator participants involved in PTPD courses feel that they have learned a great deal from their course work. It is clear to the evaluators that the majority of the students were able to successfully navigate within MassONE to access their course resources, participate in forums and surveys, and submit assignments. It is impressive that in a short period of time the students in these courses developed lessons plans and most either had used these activities, or plan to use them, in their classes.

The first session of the PTPD project went very well. The evaluators do feel that PTPD project leaders need to address the retention rate of the first session courses. Although most of the courses were under enrolled by the actual start of classes, other potential students who had signed up for the courses were not invited to fill these slots. The time of day for face-to-face sessions for hybrid courses as well as the entire registration process should be reviewed.

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## I. Evaluation Data Collected

|                             | Teachers<br>(Participants)   | Administrators<br>(Participants)   | Course<br>Administrators/Instructors                               |
|-----------------------------|--|--|--|
| PTPD<br>Courses             | Observations of class participation and/or face-to-face sessions<br>Focus Groups<br>Pre and Post Class Surveys | Observations of class participation and/or face-to-face sessions<br>Focus Groups<br>Pre and Post Class Surveys | Observations of classes and/or face-to-face sessions<br>Interviews |
| Participant<br>Work Product | Teacher Interviews<br>Plans for Curriculum<br>Units/Lesson Plans   |  |  |

## II. Class Participant Surveys

### Participant Pre-Class Surveys

All 96 participants in the first session PTPD courses were asked to complete a pre-class survey that was posted on the class web pages of MassONE during the first week of class (Dec 1-8, 2006). The number of respondents to the pre-class survey was 86, or 89.6% of participants. The survey questions and responses are compiled below:

## **Why did you select this course?**

Responses varied:

- I was interested in taking an on line course and the topic was of great interest to me.
- To improve my ability to differentiate instruction and become more aware of the impact of technology.
- I'm taking this course so I can guide the teachers at my school in using the online assessment tool. I'm the sole person responsible for "unfolding" MassONE to our staff at the school and I felt I needed more information in order to guide them better.
- I'm a Math teacher transitioning to a technology position within my school district where integration of technology into the curriculum is a major focus.
- I selected this course because I am always interested in integrating technology into the curriculum and I see a real need in educating administrators as to the importance of bringing technology into the classroom
- I am interested in collaboration with fellow colleagues in my district. This was a good opportunity for us to work together towards a unified goal and presentation within our department
- To increase my ownership of curriculum design.
- Two reasons: one; I want to increase my salary and two; I would like to be more effective in using technology w/ my art and photography classes
- In order to complete Department of Education requirements for teacher certification and to take advantage of the opportunity to learn more about using media and technology in the classroom.

## **How many online courses have you taken?**

40 had never taken an online course, 21 had taken 1 or 2, 11 had taken 3 or 4, and 14 had taken 5 or more online courses

## **I feel confident I have the necessary tech skills to navigate through an online course easily.**

43 said strongly agree, and 35 said agree, but 4 said strongly disagree, and 4 said neither agree nor disagree.

## **How do you access the Internet from home?**

23 had DSL and 51 had cable, 9 had dial-up, 2 had no access from home, and 1 was not sure how home access was done

## **Where do you access the Internet?**

81 access the Internet both from home and from school, 3 access the Internet only from school, and 2 access the Internet only from home

## How often have you used MassONE during this school year?

15 used it all the time, 16 had used it several times, and 55 had never used MassONE before

## Any other comments you'd like to make?

Comments ranged from:

- I know there will be a high learning curve for me but I'm looking forward to learning all the different materials the course has to offer
- I am quite interested in the concept of getting MA DOE approved ProDev courses in this way. I also want to use these techniques in the classroom; as the "integrated" teaching theories are aligned with my own.
- I really don't know what to expect. I need to take a look at the syllabus.
- I think MassONE is going to become a very successful tool for teachers. I will be doing some training in the use of it in my district. One of the most valuable tools is the hard drive. It has saved me many times as I travel from school to school.
- I like doing this because I am learning the way I hope to be teaching my students in the not to distant future. It will also give me an idea of how easy or difficult it might be for them to learn.
- I'd like to see more PD courses made available online.
- I am a little anxious regarding the content and technology skills necessary to complete this course
- MassONE needs to be more streamlined so that beginning users will not feel intimidated. And there needs to be LOTS of training on how to use all the things that are available here
- MassOne is waaay too complicated. Too many links make for difficult navigation. Please help.

## Participant Post-Class Surveys

All participants who completed a PTPD course were asked to respond to a post-class survey that was posted on their class web pages on MassONE during the last week of classes (Feb. 6-13, 2007). The following is a compilation of all responses. The number of respondents to this survey was 60.

### Rank the factors that influenced your decision to register in this course. (1 greatest to 8 least)

| Factor   | Rank |
|--|------|
| Title of Course  | 4    |
| Reputation of the organization/presenter offering the course | 5    |
| Convenience  | 4    |
| Delivery Method (all online; some f2f; etc.)                 | 4    |
| Cost   | 4    |
| Content  | 3    |
| PDPs offered   | 5    |
| Grad Credit was possible                                     | 5    |

**Please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements.**

|   | SA | A  | N | D | SD |
|---|----|----|---|---|----|
| (a) Access to the Internet from home was always reliable and available                    | 43 | 10 | 1 | 2 | 0  |
| (b) Access to the Internet from school always reliable and available                      | 33 | 13 | 5 | 4 | 1  |
| (c) MassONE was always reliable and available for access to my PTPD course                | 30 | 17 | 5 | 4 | 0  |
| (d) I was able to navigate through MassONE to reach all the components of my PTPD course. | 28 | 22 | 1 | 4 | 1  |
| (e) I would recommend this course to a colleague.   | 40 | 13 | 3 | 0 | 0  |

**Was your instructor knowledgeable and responsive to your questions? Please give an example.**

All 60 respondents felt their instructors were knowledgeable; a few voiced some concern about responsiveness. Sample comments:

- the instructor was knowledgeable. She answered all the questions I had during the course. For example; I did not know how to navigate MassOne and she helped when I questioned her.
- The instructor was incredibly helpful and responsive and even personable. He was very understanding and helpful.
- knowledgeable...yes. responsive; inconsistent. I emailed about getting an assignment in at a later date and did not receive a response.
- the instructor was knowledgeable. I do think it would be a good idea to train instructors who have not taught an "online" course before as the interaction is very different than it is face2face.
- instructor was excellent. Most questions were answered within 24 hours. For example; I had a question on one of the assignments--a link was dead. I heard back before the end of that same day
- Any time we have question; he was quick to respond online to all problems.
- The instructor was very knowledgeable; but I would like to have had more timely comments in the forums and some direction as to what was expected of us as far as responding to others' posts.

**Were you to take it again, would you want more, less, or the same amount of face-to-face interaction in this course? Please explain your answer.**

The majority of respondents felt the amount of face-to-face interaction was appropriate given the course description. A few wanted more, a few less face-to-face sessions, but when respondents wanted more, they usually admitted that face-to-face was difficult to schedule. Typical comments:

- This course does not need any face to face
- I definitely would want more face -to-face interaction.... or at least would have teamed up with others at my school so we could work as a team.
- I would like to have more as we had none. We communicated only on line
- The reason I take on-line classes is because I am a self-motivated learner; and enjoy the time it gives me to investigate situations and ideas.
- Definitely not less. This was the right amount although one more session wouldn't have hurt.
- I found the ratio of face-to-face and online time well-balanced
- I would have liked to have at least two face to face interactions; one at the beginning and one at the end.
- The same -hard to fit in those face to face meetings with busy schedules.
- All online was perfect.
- One of the major things I've learned is that I need the face to face contact in order to remain accountable; stay motivated; and participate.

**Do you feel that your school district should offer courses to faculty and staff through MassONE? Please explain your answer.**

The majority felt that this would be a good idea. Typical explanations:

- because educators should be familiar with MassONE and all it has to offer.
- it is a convenient way to take courses online so that we could do it together at school if the computers were working.
- It would make it easier to complete necessary PDP or Grad Credit if they were offered through this organized and online structure
- Work at home; at your convenience; low cost...no brainer
- I think using MassONE is a great way to take classes. By the district using this platform; people are aware of the different programs and possibilities available to them. It also justifies the monies that have been invested in this program.
- It's a relatively easy way to take a course either for graduate credit or for PDPs;

Those few who did not think this was a good idea had comments like:

- Until MassONE comes up with a better interface for online courses I would not recommend it as the venue to offer online courses.
- MassOne is the worse online learning environment I have ever used. It would need a major revision before I could recommend anyone use MassOne for online learning.

**Do you feel that your school district should use MassONE to offer online resources and hybrid courses to your students? Please explain your answer.**

Again, the majority thought this was a good idea. Typical comments:

- This would benefit both students and educators with technology exposure.

- it is the future!
- I believe that educators should be instructed in how to get classes onto the site in order to spark classroom discussions and/or share notes; etc
- In my opinion; students should have access to MassONE. I think they would respond favorably to hybrid courses utilizing online and face to face instruction.
- I feel the district should offer training and accessibility to the MassOne site for homework; drop boxes; etc. If the school and IT staff promotes the site; you will have a higher level of staff skill and acceptance.
- It would be a great way to offer programs that the highs schools cannot offer due to budget constraints and numbers.

Those who did not agree expressed concern that MassONE might not be appropriate for younger students, or that the schools do not have the technology necessary for students to use MassONE. Typical comments:

- At the present time; I do not think my school has enough computer access to offer these types of courses to students.
- we are not ready for that yet. students need a reliable tool and training.
- I think that this is a ways off for elementary school students. More staff needs to be comfortable and familiar with the technology before they would be ready to guide students.
- Not at the elementary level
- Not many of my students have internet access.
- I do not think that the current framework is easy to navigate for students at the elementary level in our school.

**Based on your participation in this PTPD course, have you developed plans to implement new teaching practices in your classroom? If yes, please provide a brief description of your plans.**

The vast majority either has plans or has actually implemented new ideas in their classrooms. Typical comments:

- I have developed plans to implement new teaching practices in my classroom. Through this course one of the things I have done is to create a classroom webpage.
- I have already tried using some of the things I learned. I plan to use the survey tool. I have a homepage set up on MassONE currently. I plan to get my students more involved in using MassONE.
- I will be using a WebQuest I developed and presenting it as an idea to the faculty.
- I will try to integrate the principles of UDL into new and existing lessons
- The tools and reinforcement gained in this course will allow me to better; and more efficiently design my lesson plans.
- As I had stated in the UDL forum; this course provided me with instructional methods that I immediately put into practice within my classroom.
- I will be using my lesson created for this class with my students.

- My first initiative; after taking this course; is to access the newest math standards by TOPIC using the Curriculum Tools search engine. I found this extremely efficient
- The unit I developed will be used for the next concert I do. I am using the exercises; guiding questions; and assessments now.
- I have developed a lesson that provides a good technology integration and will be fun for the students. The lesson meets the NETS and Mass frameworks.

### **Do you have any comments to make about this course?**

Most of the comments were extremely positive. Typical responses:

- Thank you for offering this type of Professional Development
- It was very well done. Very organized and I'm actually surprised that the 8 weeks are over.
- Thanks! I grew with the materials in this course.
- I learned a lot and it was very convenient. Thank You!
- Great concepts; excellent execution!
- I found the readings; text and resources to be valuable tools to support methods to differentiate instruction in the classroom across the curriculum. There were concrete examples that can be shared with colleagues as user friendly. The instructors are great!
- It was fantastic. I hope I have the chance to take more courses this way.

Of the few negative comments, most dealt with problems navigating through MassONE, while others were critical of feedback from instructors:

- Content was great; MassOne was not.
- Site navigation was very poor. Too confusing with too many options and no clear consistency.
- It was not only difficult to navigate from forum (for answering questions) to VHD (to see the week's syllabus); it was also frustrating to have to copy and paste questions into a word processing document and then have to copy and paste them back online to respond. This process needs to be more streamlined for the average computer user.
- The major thing that I would change in this course is to have MassOne ensure that all the technology is working and is easily accessible before the course runs.
- Great course; iVocalize is a great tool. CAST did a wonderful job! I was a little disappointed on the lack of feedback on my forum postings and submitted work though.

### **Data Collected from Non-Persistent Students**

The evaluators contacted students who originally registered for a PTPD course, but did not complete it. The majority gave personal reasons for having to drop out of the course. A few said that they had technical problems, some expressed confusion about being registered for the course, while others said that they wanted free graduate credit for the course. Selected comments:

- I applied for this course in error without taking note of the other restrictions I have right now and after the initial problems, when I couldn't even find the course information anywhere in order to get started, I decided that the spring course would be a more feasible course for me to do.
- I have been in contact with the course instructors about having to take the course at a later time, and received confirmation by email about it.
- I was told the class was full and I could not take it.
- I DID sign up for a course but never received word whether my application was accepted,
- I will be unable to take this course – sorry, but I have some personal issues that I need to address.
- I am sorry to say it was necessary for me to stop participating in the two online courses I had signed up for because of serious issues at home.
- After reviewing the detailed syllabus, I felt that at this time I can not give the course the quality time it requires. Although, I am grateful for being considered to take this course and I hope that I may participate in another course at a later date.
- I did not complete the course. Frankly, I found it very difficult to follow the computer directions. I think if you do this again you should streamline the work being done on the computer. I also think a little more time should be spent at the beginning to make sure that everyone understands how to navigate through all the pages. The content wasn't difficult, but the process was very difficult for someone not raised on the computer.
- I will not be taking this class. We were misinformed that this was going to be a free course that provided graduate credit.
- I have decided not to take the course because the information I was given stated that I would receive 2 grad credits for the course. I did contact the women that sent me the class confirmation and she told me most likely there would be graduate credits offered but there would be a fee. I was interested in taking it for grad credit. I was not informed or aware of the fee for it. Also, I could not be 100% sure grad credit would be offered.
- I couldn't make it to the first meeting as I requested it as a Professional Development Day and did not get it approved on time to participate therefore, I opted to pass on this opportunity for now. Please remove me from your e-mail list and thank you for such a wonderful opportunity.

### **III. Interviews with Course Participants, Providers, Instructors and Administrators**

#### **Interviews with Course Providers/Administrators**

The administrators of the PTPD courses were asked what went well in the first session, what didn't go so well, and if they planned to make any changes in the course administration for the second session?

Some general comments about what went well in the first session:

- Basically, I think it was great that we were all able to work together and bring the PTPD vision to reality in a relatively short amount of time.

- The MassONE help desk folks were great. They were very responsive both to the participants and to us as the provider whenever there was an issue which needed addressing
- I do believe that both sessions offered by CAST went fairly well.

When asked what did not go so well, administrators responded:

- We didn't anticipate the level of interest there would be, especially for courses that were completely online. We also didn't realize how many people would register and then change their mind about actually taking the course.
- Not enough information was collected by the potential participants, - addresses were not asked for - so when we went to send out "completion" certificates we have to contact participants (and sometimes nag) them to send us addresses.
- The only part of the administration that did not go well was the communication of who was in the courses

Administrators plan to make some adjustments to the enrollment process for the second session:

- Now ...(that) enrolling potential participants into the class has been turned over to us, the system became both complicated and simpler. It is simpler because we are establishing our own set of criteria (first signed up - first asked). It is still taking a great deal of time and email (often times more than 3 emails per participant - answering questions, obtaining confirmation that they indeed - do want to take the class, etc).
- For the second session we decided to go with just first-come, first-served basis (to select class members)

## **Instructor Interviews**

The evaluators asked the PTPD course instructors what went well in the first session courses, what didn't go so well, and if they plan to make any changes in the courses for the second session. They were also asked if their students were motivated and disciplined learners, and technically skilled enough to successfully navigate the course website. Finally, they were asked their opinion of MassONE as a course management system.

### **What went well?**

- The first face-to-face, though sparsely attended, provided the participants with an example of a rich technology-integrated project (Journey North) as well as a lens through which to think about technology integration in their own settings. The conversation was lively and rich. There was some subsequent online discussion but not much.
- The content and timing of both courses were excellent. The topics were relevant to the students and the projects were meaningful as well as useful to the teachers and their students.
- I think the discussions - both face to face and to a lesser extent - on-line in the forums helped the participants wrestle with some difficult concepts to arrive at a new or deeper understanding of

Understanding by Design and Differentiated Instruction. The face-to-face classes provided immediate, real time feedback to their ideas from the instructor and the other participants. The asynchronous nature of the on-line forums provided more time for reflective composition of replies, but provided less feedback for the late posters, or those with content specific questions to the K-12 audience.

- Those participants that participated were highly self-motivated and engaged in the course content.
- Many of the students were very enthusiastic about the course and there was a great deal of dialogue among them in the weekly forums. I think it was helpful to have the three components, the face-to-face, the weekly online discussions and the iVocalize sessions.

### **What didn't go so well?**

- Although many of the students engaged in a dialogue on the forums, I think some students simply posted responses to the questions and did not interact with other participants. I sometimes felt like I was "evaluating" short answer responses, rather than facilitating an on line discussion.
- Even those participants that participated did not make extensive use of the forums as we had hoped. And then there were the students that never engaged at all in the course from the start.
- There were very minor first-time-through glitches that were easily clarified. One web reference was a little dated but provided a very teachable moment to point out that time can change the accuracy of resources.
- The challenge for me was that the course was designed and structured for school administrators with a team of teachers. Since none of the participants fit that profile, it was a bit awkward.
- I had some students who'd posted material at the end of the course who then found it frustrating that the forums disappeared from view so quickly. I ended up having them email me documents.
- Once we started the online activities, I discovered that about a third of the group could not find our course, had trouble posting, and/or could not upload document to the VHD. So I spent a lot of time emailing participants about the mechanics of using MassONE.
- One thing we had not discussed as content providers was what would happen to the forums and VHD materials after the last day of class. I still had students preparing dissemination documents and final versions of curriculum units that needed to be posted. There was feedback in the forums from participants and the instructor as to suggested changes to the curriculum unit drafts. The Forums suddenly disappeared leaving participants asking me where they could find them. We need to work out a process where the forums continue to be visible beyond the last day of the course.

### **Were students technically skilled, motivated and disciplined?**

- Yes and no. They did not participate to a great extent in the online forums, though they were engaged in the face-to-face sessions
- I very much appreciated the dedication of the students and their willingness to work hard. The projects submitted were outstanding and displayed a good grasp of the materials presented. The time of year (through the holidays and some weather problems) presented challenges for some. There were also some family illness situations but students reacted well and were able to work through the problems and showed a very high degree of dedication. A few students had to drop out because of personal situations but were gracious and did so reluctantly.

- Of course, technical skilled varied but there was support within the groups to help one another. Some were very knowledgeable and skilled while others were experiencing this type of learning for the first time. They were quick to seek help and follow directions.
- Yes. There were some confusion, particularly regarding drop areas for student work, but I think this was primarily due to unclear procedures and instructions.
- I believe there was one student who was frustrated by the iVocalize sessions and found it difficult to navigate through the session. Other than that, I am unaware of any difficulties.

**What is your opinion of MassONE as a course management system??**

- I really wish it would provide a warning before it times out. It is very frustrating to be in the middle of writing a response and suddenly have it time out. Losing work with no warning in this day and age is very annoying!!!
- It's bare bones but sufficient. Not what I'd call intuitive, but once you get the hang of it it's functional.
- Some students had problems throughout most of the course with MassONE. The Helpdesk was able to help some while I was able to help others. Much of my direct contact with students was through personal e-mail. As I became more familiar with MassONE, my appreciation of some features improved.
- It worked well for me although it was a challenge to not be able to edit the course once it was up there. That prevented me from the kind of flexibility I needed. It would also have been helpful to have had the course forums archived where I could see them after the course was over.

**Do you plan to make changes for the second session?**

- I'll be revising some activities to make them more easily done online and will only plan one face-to-face to kick off the course.
- I will be restructuring the forum questions. I plan to break students into smaller groups of five or six and I will ask each student to take responsibility for posting the first response to assigned questions which others can respond to. I hope these changes will facilitate a discussion among students rather than an answer and question period. I have also included suggestions in the syllabus for what students should include in their responses, these include: draw from the readings, share promising and helpful web sites, and share anecdotes that illustrate UDL.
- Better explain to the students that the forums should be used interactively, and in turn more frequently monitor and respond to student postings.
- Very minor corrections to assignment clarification and updating of two reference sites.

**DOE Email Interviews**

Susan Hargrave of the Mass DOE conducted an email interview with a number of participants in the UDL course, a hybrid course that had one face-to-face session and three synchronous sessions. She graciously shared her results with the evaluators. The following are selected responses to her questions:

**Why did you want to take an online course?**

- Topic and outline were what I was interested in. Online gives me flexibly to go at my own pace and I do not have to be at class at a certain time on a certain day. The inclusion of a face to face and 3 synchronous meetings was important so I could communicate with the other students and the instructor and put faces to the names.
- I enjoy the flexibility and relaxed atmosphere (at home) each course provides.
- I took an online course because of its flexibility. It allows me to teach, and avoids most of the commuting. It allows me to work at my own pace.
- I have taken and facilitated online courses and although I know they are not for all learners they work for me.

### **Did you ever take an online course before?**

- I have taken and facilitated online courses and although I know they are not for all learners they work for me.
- I have taken a Thompson online course- Solving Classroom Discipline Problems
- I've taken approximately 20 on-line courses. Most have been academic and training based courses.
- Yes, several through University of Southern Maine, and one at Lesley College.

### **What do you like about taking an online course?**

- Easy to access the resources from anywhere and work anywhere.
- I like the iVocalize, the mix, and diversity in the group, and especially Peggy Coyne.
- You can work on a lesson anytime of the day or night. You don't have to worry about being late for class or fighting traffic.
- As I have ADD, I have a difficult time listening to someone lecture for a long period of time. These courses are the best of all worlds for me. It has the personal, face-to-face introductions, the rapid interchange of the web casts, and the flexibility of the asynchronous sessions.
- The flexibility of the schedule.

### **How does an online course compare/differ from a face-to-face course?**

- Face-to-face requires me to commit to a specific time and place to meet. Online requires you not to procrastinate and to keep up with the work, probably the hardest part for many students. Online you can lose the dialogue that goes on in a face to face class, which can be excellent. This online course allowed for that to occur since it was run through MASSONE and we had iVocalize sessions and forums. Content and work accomplished was similar to a face to face class. We could actually view each others work because it was submitted electronically too.
- Online courses are more work, more labor intense, requires work that is more independent/ research not to mention you have more of a voice, since in the classroom you can only speak when given the opportunity. However, online, you are free to respond.
- I think this varies with each course and each facilitator. The primary difference is that the student must be self motivated. If they are not then they will quickly fall behind and it becomes difficult to

realize the full value of the course. This is particularly true in online courses that have active discussion boards.

### **Do you feel you are able to interact with the other participants? Why or why not?**

- Yes, we interact in a number of ways. Every few weeks we interact with each other using a web based teleconference program called iVocalize. We also submit answers to questions provided by the instructor via an online forum.
- I feel that the extent of interaction, just like any class, is a function of the individuals in the group. The more active the communications, the more ideas are exchanged and discussed. Actually the web setting may be more conducive to directed discussion.
- This has not happened to the degree that I would have liked it to happen. The material that this course covers is excellent and between the book, *Teaching Every Student in the Digital Age* (which is available online), and the additional links to readings that are included the quality of the resources has been excellent. The discussion forums have been the weaker link (from my perspective).

### **What was the synchronous session like? Did you feel that it added to the course?**

- I think the synchronous session is an excellent medium for these forums. I enjoyed the rapid-fire, simultaneous text and voice discussions. I might suggest that the moderator read the text postings aloud. This would allow everyone to follow along easier.
- The first synchronous session ran smoothly once everyone was logged in. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> session there were more technical glitches and I know that as they used iVocalize to send us to online sites to explore I had a lot of crashing of my computer which required that I log off the session and then back on in order to be an active participant. This was quite frustrating but some worthwhile information came to me during the session.
- The synchronous sessions added a lot to the course. It gave everyone an opportunity to exchange ideas, questions, and reflections on the assignments.
- Yes, it took a couple of technical adjustments but I thought it was very easy and a great accessible tool, that added a whole new dimension to the typical online class

### **What are some things that you think other people should know about taking an online course?**

- Do keep up with the work, go on MASSONE regularly and keep up weekly Do not be put off that it looks like too much technology and you will not be able to figure it out; plenty of support and help was available. I was able to learn a lot about MASSONE and its features by talking the class on MASSONE.
- It has been said that you get out of education what you put into it. This is no truer than when you take a course online.
- I would strongly encourage every educator to take an online course(s). Online courses are flexible. You can complete the work day or night. However, you still have to complete the work and send it in on time. Online courses are not for everyone. You have to discipline yourself to complete the work. If you have a crazy home life (kids) it may not be for you. Don't be shy, give an online course a try.

- Like our students, every teacher learns differently. Be sure that the online techniques work for your style of learning. If you can't stick to a course schedule without a concrete place/time, it may not work for you.
- That there is an expectation that you be an active part of the community or the community will not form. That you must put in the time on a regular basis or you won't be an active part of the community. That online learning is not for everyone.

### **III. Participant Observations**

#### **Online Course Observations**

The evaluators “lurked” frequently into the PTPD courses, navigating through the course materials and noting the number of postings to the forums for each class. All of the course providers included introductory materials, syllabi, course schedules, and resources for their classes. There were some minor differences in the location and appearance of these materials that may be a topic of discussion for the partners in deliberations of future course sessions. In general, the majority of the students made thoughtful, reflective and relevant contributions to the class discussions. Most of the students seemed engaged in the forums, but just as in face-to-face classes, there were some students who did not contribute to the class discussions, while others were quite “vocal” in the number of their postings. All of the classes utilized the forums to some extent; however, the totally online classes seemed to use the forums more extensively. The instructors of the hybrid courses may want to consider expanding the use of the forums in the next sessions.

#### **Observations of Face-to-Face Sessions**

The evaluators attended the first face-to-face session of the Teacher Tech. course that was held in Worcester on Dec. 5, 2006, as well as the first face-to-face sessions for the Curriculum Design course and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leadership course, held in Marlborough on Dec. 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> respectively. The face-to-face sessions were used as an introduction to the courses, explanation of PPD vs. graduate credit requirements and general clarification of the instructor's goals for the course. The first session also gave the class participants an opportunity to meet the instructor and the other students in the course. During this session, the evaluator explained the purpose of an objective evaluation of the PTPD project, and requested that the students complete a pre-class survey located on their class website. This ensured that all students had an active MassONE account, that they understood how to log into MassONE, and that they could locate their class web page. Many students expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to meet and to confirm their ability to access the online portions of their class.

In addition, the evaluators “lurked” in iVocalize sessions of the UDL course on Jan. 24<sup>th</sup> and Feb. 13<sup>th</sup>, and also attended the final face-to-face session of the Curriculum Design course on Feb. 9<sup>th</sup>. These sessions were specifically geared to the course topics and gave participants an opportunity to share their ideas with their colleagues and instructor.

Based on class discussions, it was clear to the evaluator that the students enjoyed this time with the other members of their course, that they were actively engaged in learning, and that those who participated contributed valuable thoughts and insights to the overall dialog. None of these sessions were fully attended, although the iVocalize sessions garnered a bigger turnout than did the actual face-to-face sessions. Participants in the face-to-face sessions expressed concern with the difficulties of leaving school early to attend class, and while participants in the iVocalize sessions expressed some frustration with using a technology that was new to them.

## **IV. Focus Groups**

### **PTPD Participant Focus Groups (Organized by asked questions)**

The focus groups were held on Feb. 9<sup>th</sup> for the Curriculum Design course at their last f2f session, and on Feb. 13<sup>th</sup> for the Universal Design for Learning course at their last iVocalize session. The following questions were asked and responses are summarized here.

#### **Did the course meet your expectations? If so, how? If not, why not?**

The answer was a resounding Yes from all participants. Sample comments:

- Yes, I found the course to be well-run, engaging and informative
- Yes - I had little knowledge and lots of confusion about the subject before and I'm walking away with understanding and more ways to differentiate than I expected.

#### **In what ways, if any, did your own personal technical skills impact your ability to be a successful participant in your PTPD course? Please describe what technical skills you were you lacking and/or which ones were particularly helpful in your completion of the course.**

Most responded that they had enough technical skills so it wasn't an issue, but they did have some comments:

- The only time I had difficulties was in our 2nd iVocalize conference. Not because of mine but the second iVocalize session was glitchy in general including my hardware. I had support from a classmate
- I know someone who dropped out because she didn't have tech skills even though she wanted to learn the content
- Tech part wasn't too bad – need to have dates associated with each week on syllabus
- If you had taken on-line classes before it worked great I have taken many online courses and found my other courses to be easier to navigate and I had very few problems with using Blackboard
- I suspect that some of the issues came from the fact that this was the first online course CAST (or at least Peggy) offered. There should be some training for the facilitator as teaching an online course is very different from a f2f course.
- Technical problems solved by Bob – great feedback. I found MassONE responsive

- I have low technical skills. I need things spelled out. I should have spent time understanding what was in the resources folder, for example. I did not understand many of the references made by my classmates to tech things I am unfamiliar with. In spite of this, I learned some things.
- In true content management system there is in fact a system...so the forums don't move up and down based on which forum was most recently responded to. And it is possible to print out all emails without opening one at once. I could go on if that would be helpful.

**Please describe how what you have learned in this course will impact your classroom practice.**

All participants seemed to feel they had learned something in the course that would impact their classroom practice:

- I will be using the resources I got from this class for years to come.
- How enduring understanding differs from an essential question
- I have already put into practice many of the strategies of UDL within my classroom.
- I got a lot of great tools and techniques from the course, and hope to follow this up with additional work.

**Do you believe that this course would have been better, worse, or just the same if it had been taught as a traditional face-to-face course? Further, what about this course – if anything – made it superior to a traditionally delivered course.**

Most responded that they were happy with the delivery method of their course. Sample comments:

- Would not have as much value if totally online – easier to ask questions when we were actually together
- I don't think it's better than face-to-face but it was easier to fit into my hectic lifestyle
- Learning online is the way to learn. Forget about face-to-face
- To some degree that is like comparing apples and oranges. With an online course there is time for reflection that is different from a f2f discussion. For some folks online courses work...for others they don't. Having the opportunity to take a course that meets your schedule is one advantage.
- Our f-2-f sessions gave us valuable presentations of instructor and important hands-on work, I would miss this classroom interaction

**When asked if there were any other comments, participants said:**

- I hope more of these kind of courses are available
- Consider having the f-2-f session from 4-7 instead 1-4, two ½ days from 2-5
- The course was very worthwhile. I will continue to recommend it to others. The MassOne glitches I experienced this week made completing the coursework more of a challenge but did not take away from the overall value of the course.

## **Worcester Focus Group**

In addition to the focus group data reported above, the evaluators conducted a focus group of Worcester (largest cohort) students on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Eighteen teachers and administrators were asked the same questions as the other focus groups, as well as two additional questions about their plans to create online activities and improved communication in their district or schools.

### **Did the course meet your expectations? If so, how? If not, why not?**

All said that their courses had met their expectations.

- “I had never done online assessment before – the course made me do it – and I had my kids take it – they enjoyed it and some found it a much easier way to take tests.
- “The course gave me resources to give to my teachers – nice to see MassONE being used for a specific purpose.”

### **In what ways, if any, did your own personal technical skills impact your ability to be a successful participant in your PTPD course? Please describe what technical skills you were you lacking and/or which ones were particularly helpful in your completion of the course.**

All seem to feel that using MassONE was not terribly difficult, although there was some time needed to get familiar with how to navigate to all the course resources.

- “It was relatively easy if you had medium tech skills – I hadn’t taken an online course before”
- “It was sometimes difficult to navigate thru MassONE – navigation was not intuitive – not as seamless as Moodle or Blackboard – I just had to get use to it”
- “The flow of MassOne was unusual, for example, the forums didn’t allow you to see more than posting at a time.”
- “One unintended benefit of these courses is that they helped people to understand what an online course is all about”

### **Please describe how what you have learned in this course will impact your classroom practice.**

Most seemed to think the work they did in their courses will directly impact their teaching

- “I see now that creating online assessments gives the kids a different environment where they can take a test, and they enjoy doing their tests online. But I need to find the time to create online assessments and I’m not sure about how parents view online assessment”
- “Our reading center now uses online assessment since we don’t have access to a copy machine so it is easier to have the students use the computers than to try to make copies of a test. I had never used online assessment before I took the course. My students like it a lot better” When asked if her students had better test results online she said “the results depend on students, some still need a paper version to keep focused, while others like the computer much more than paper and pencil.”

- “Some of the UDL tools we were exposed to will help us differentiate instruction in the classroom. Some examples of these tools are the many resources on CAST websites.”

**Do you believe that this course would have been better, worse, or just the same if it had been taught as a traditional face-to-face course? Further, what about this course – if anything – made it superior to a traditionally delivered course.**

- “I learned I needed to see a face to place with the names of the other class members in order to feel a part of the class.”
- “The initial face-to-face was good, but I really enjoyed the online activities.”
- “I found I was less accountable than I would have been in a face-to-face class.”
- “I took an online course a while ago and that’s the only format I want now.”
- “I like online classes, but I understand what people mean when they say they have a need to get to know the people in the class.”
- “Our course was supposed to have 3 face to face meetings and the first was great, but attendance was very poor for the second f2f, so we couldn’t do the planned activities, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> f2f meeting was canceled. I was disappointed, because there are some activities can’t be done online – need f2f for those activities. The best format is a combination of f2f and online”
- “I feel tech illiterate – iVocalize sessions mentioned things I had never heard of, and I didn’t dare try to use any on my own, but I’m sure I would have asked about them in a traditional f2f session”
- “It would be different if a group from the same school took the same online course, then they could help each other through the course.”

The next two questions were asked only to the Worcester cohort:

**As a result of your participation in a PTPD course, have you or so you plan to develop online activities for your classes? If so, please provide a brief description.**

The Worcester cohort has been divided into teams, each of which will develop an online professional development course for the teachers of Worcester to be offered this summer through MassONE. In addition to developing plans for these courses, they reported:

- “Two teachers now use online assessment.”
- “Another does guided Internet searches with her students on Monday (when the lab is available) in science or social studies classes.”
- “Librarians have created a library research online orientation for students after taking 21<sup>st</sup> Cent. Literacy course”
- “A coordinator sends out websites to teachers that he thinks they would find useful – but knows that for some teachers it is hard to find time to manage the computers.”
- “Tech trainers have developed course on how to best utilize computers available to teachers.”

**As a result of your participation in a PTPD course, do you feel communication has improved between you and your colleagues at your school or within your district? If so, please give an example of improved communication.**

There was a general consensus that communication had indeed improved, selected comments:

- Yes – know the people from the course better
- Being in a course helped to improve dialogue within the disciplines

**When asked if there were any other comments, participants said:**

- “Collaboration between staff worked effectively because we had a reason to use MassONE”
- You might want to try archiving past courses. It is very disappointing that we can't get into our course. Usually they will archive them for at least a year following an online course. That is one of the beauties of online - the ability to go back and revisit even when the course is over. Also - we never received feedback on our presentation or anything. I think I understand the way the presenters of our course felt but - we were the ones who still did the work. I will contact them regarding our certificates too.”