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A STUDY OF PBS TEACHERLINE ONLINE COURSE FACILITATION

Prepared for: PBS TeacherLine

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By

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PBS TeacherLine has been providing professional development to k-12 teachers through a catalog of more than 130 online courses, taught by over 100 course facilitators, for the past ten years. As with their pioneering online course content and delivery model, PBS TeacherLine has implemented a support and feedback strategy for their online course instructors (“facilitators”) that embodies research-based best practices, including an innovative 3D course review process.

This report summarizes both the methods and findings from a yearlong formative-summative research study on PBS TeacherLine’s national facilitation model and 3D course reviews, and provides documents and procedures that PBS TeacherLine uses to support and evaluate their online course instructors. The study involved multiple, mixed applied research activities that took place from September 2009 through August 2010, during four consecutive PBS TeacherLine course terms. A smaller study of local course facilitation support took place during the Spring 2010 term.

Key findings from the research include:

Facilitator qualifications:

- PBS TeacherLine requires all online course facilitators to hold master’s degrees (16.3% hold CAS/EdS or PhD degrees) and have prior experience as online learners before facilitating a national course. At least one third of national course facilitators had enrolled in 30 or more online courses as learners before the Fall 2009 course term, and half had been teaching online for more than five years at that time. Local course facilitators are less experienced online learners than their national counterparts but are comparably experienced online instructors.

PBS TeacherLine’s professional development offerings:

- At the core of PBS TeacherLine’s facilitator training program is the importance of positioning online facilitators as learners themselves. PBS TeacherLine has created: *Online Facilitator Training I: Mastering the Skills of Online Teaching (OFT I)*, in which all new facilitators enroll; *OFT I plus Mentoring*, throughout which facilitators conduct a national-level course with the aid of a mentor who supports and monitors this first facilitation effort; and *OFT II: Adjusting (or Dusting) Your Facilitator Hat*, which provides advanced research-based content to enrich the instruction of more experienced online facilitators. Nearly sixty percent of national facilitators (59.4%) and a third of local facilitators (30.5%) have completed both *OFT I* and *OFT II*, and facilitators rate the quality of *OFT I*, *OFT II* and mentoring very highly.
- Supplementing *OFT I*, *OFT II* and mentoring are embedded learning opportunities through faculty meetings, a professional learning community of TeacherLine facilitators (FUN), and a resource library that support facilitators’ ongoing information needs in real time. Although nearly four in ten national facilitators are lurkers who refer to the FUN to gain information and/or networking more than they contribute to the site, three in ten facilitators feel the manager-moderated FUN is essential to their success as a TeacherLine course facilitator. Local course facilitators are less active in the FUN than national facilitators, and the value they place on the FUN is correspondingly lower.
- Facilitators rate the quality of PBS TeacherLine’s professional development and support they receive as online course facilitators very highly; superior to most of the preparation they have received offered by agencies other than PBS TeacherLine. Facilitators have very few unmet specific learning needs related to online facilitation, which suggests an adequate scope of support provided by PBS TeacherLine.

Assessing facilitator performance and quality

- PBS TeacherLine facilitator performance during a course term is assessed in three ways: by facilitators through reflection logs, by PBS TeacherLine's Associate Director for Online Facilitation using an evaluative rubric, and by learners who complete post-course learner surveys that, in aggregate, provide a third perspective on facilitator performance. All feedback on a facilitator's performance from each source is aggregated into one document and returned to facilitators through annual 3D course reviews.
 - As a whole, PBS TeacherLine's online course facilitators excel at many key competencies that are consistent with current research on effective online facilitation skills: course climate and community building, instruction, interaction and discussion facilitation, course organization, implementation of assessments and other (e.g. compliance with TeacherLine's procedures).
 - PBS TeacherLine tended to rate national course facilitators more favorably than local course facilitators, though facilitators' and learners' ratings converged.
 - Facilitators also articulated areas for improvement in their own performance, which converged across course terms: landscape posts, presence on the discussion board, and providing constructive, valuable and specific feedback to learners.
 - Participation in PBS TeacherLine's 3D course review process promotes critical self-reflection, with facilitators gaining the capacity to critically assess their performance over time.
 - Learner evaluations, examined in aggregate across facilitators and terms, also reveal high quality facilitation and their ratings of facilitator performance align with ratings provided by PBS TL. Learners' satisfaction with course experiences and their descriptions of facilitator excellence reinforce these findings. Learner ratings of their facilitators were very similar for national and local courses.
 - Most facilitators will enroll in another TeacherLine course, recommend TeacherLine courses to their colleagues, and immediately apply what they learned from TeacherLine courses as a result of their facilitator's high quality performance.

Suggestions for the future

- According to the program evaluation rubric created during this study, up to 40 percent of PBS TeacherLine's facilitators would benefit from additional support and/or professional development in order to improve their performance, as characterized by both PBS TeacherLine and course learners.
- Facilitators revealed during the research study that PBS TeacherLine's future efforts to assure high facilitator quality should include professional development that is: embedded, problem-based, includes research-tested strategies, and has a hands-on format with extensive modeling of best practices content.

A. INTRODUCTION

Online courses have gained traction as a convenient, affordable, and credible professional development option for k-12 teachers, resulting in the need for more online course instructors. With these increased demands comes a greater-than-ever effort to prepare, support, develop and evaluate online course instructors.

PBS TeacherLine has been providing professional development to k-12 teachers through a catalog of more than 130 online courses, taught by over 100 course facilitators, for the past ten years. As with their pioneering online course content and delivery model, PBS TeacherLine has implemented a support and feedback strategy for their online course instructors ("facilitators") that embodies research-based best practices. An effective blend of online courses, non-hierarchical mentoring, regular faculty meetings and an online community have provided TeacherLine course facilitators with resources to support most aspects of online course instruction over the past decade. Seeking to deepen the facilitation program and address a need to provide facilitators with feedback about their strengths and areas of needed improvement, PBS TeacherLine recently implemented a new 3D course review process that involves multiple perspectives on facilitators' performance and offers personalized feedback about their instruction at least once a year.

Research on the effectiveness of online courses in general is emerging, yet very little research has been done to establish best practices for supporting and evaluating online course facilitators. Even fewer documents and instruments exist to outline the components and procedures that are used to evaluate online instructors. This report summarizes both the methods and findings from a yearlong formative-summative research study on PBS TeacherLine's facilitation model and 3D course review, and provides documents and procedures that PBS TeacherLine uses to support and evaluate their online course instructors. Both efforts are intended to engage a broader discussion about best practices for online course facilitation support and evaluation, and to encourage the application of these procedures in multiple settings. PBS TeacherLine's efforts to date provide a unique opportunity to examine a well-established online facilitation support and evaluation model. This study addresses the following goals:

- Goal 1:** Describe PBS TeacherLine's model for preparing and supporting online course facilitators within the context of existing research-based and commonly used best practices.
- Goal 2:** Determine the effectiveness of PBS TeacherLine's model for preparing high-quality online course facilitators among different types of course facilitators and for different types of online courses.
- Goal 3:** Measure the connection between PBS TeacherLine facilitator effectiveness and the overall course experience for learners.
- Goal 4:** Determine the scalability of PBS TeacherLine's model for providers of other online courses nationwide.
- Goal 5:** Develop instruments and guidelines for using the instruments that can be used as ongoing professional development experiences among TeacherLine facilitators.

B. METHODS

This formative-summative research study involved integrated applied research activities that took place from September 2009 through August 2010, during four consecutive PBS TeacherLine course terms, which began on the following dates:

Fall 2009 term: October 28, 2009

Winter 2010 term: January 27, 2010

Spring 2010 term: March 31, 2010

Summer 2010 term¹: June 23, 2010

A key feature of this study's design is action research, which provided ongoing support and evaluation feedback to facilitators through 3D course reviews while simultaneously providing data on how PBS TeacherLine's facilitation model really works. With a goal of enhancing the facilitation experience for facilitators, facilitator leaders and ultimately learners, significant components of the research changed during the study to keep up with facilitators as their facilitation evolved. The remaining research activities provided summative data for tracking the program's effectiveness over an annual cycle of four course terms. This approach allowed for a small comparison study of PBS TeacherLine's local course support and evaluation model that took place during the Spring 2010 term. The slightly different sampling parameters and methods used to study the local program are detailed in each of the methods for the national program study described below.

RESEARCH

PBS TeacherLine's 3D course reviews support facilitators' critical reflection on their performance while providing insight on **how well PBS TeacherLine's facilitation program really works.**

1. Participants

Over the course of the study, each of PBS TeacherLine's approximately 110 national course facilitators and all local course facilitators that have taught since September 1, 2008 (n=105; including those who facilitated national courses) participated in at least one, if not multiple, research activities. PBS TeacherLine's five national facilitator trainers, the FUN facilitator, and the Associate Director of Online Facilitation also participated in the research, both as study participants and as key designers of the research.

At a minimum, all national and local course facilitators were asked to complete a general background survey about their professional development experiences related to online course facilitation and best practices for support and evaluation to date. Local and national facilitators additionally completed reflection logs, participated in brief telephone interviews, had their courses reviewed by PBS TeacherLine, and secured learner feedback about their course during each of the terms they taught while the study was underway.

2. Data collection

Literature Review

A brief review of existing literature, as well as best practices in the area of professional development for online course facilitation support and evaluation, was conducted during October 2009 before any instrument development or data collection took place (Appendix A). The review identified dimensions of inquiry that were essential for this research study to address by framing the study's measures, analysis framework and findings.

¹ Due to the demands of changing course platforms over the summer term, *Master and Distinguished Facilitators* (see below) were exempted from participating. The very little data that was returned from the remaining summer 2010 facilitators and learners was used to further calibrate the program's instruments and rubrics.

Background Survey

At the start of the study, nearly all of PBS TeacherLine's 104 national course facilitators completed a background survey (Appendix B) that captured demographic information and their prior experience with and perceptions of support they have received to date as online instructors. The same survey was also deployed to 105 local TeacherLine course facilitators who have taught a course since September 1, 2008. Although the response rate among local facilitators was slightly lower than that of the national course facilitators (Table 1), nearly 85 percent of all TeacherLine course facilitators provided data.

Table 1: Background survey completion rates among national and local course facilitators

	Background Survey		
	Invited	Completed	Response Rate
National course facilitators	104	94	92.9%
Local course facilitators	105	82	78.1%
Total	209	176	84.2%

Reflection Logs

Facilitators also completed one online reflection log during each term of the study that (s)he taught a course. Drawing upon current research on effective professional development and online instruction, reflection logs guided facilitators through a critique of their own teaching. The logs prompted reflection among facilitators while completing them, and play a key role in the 3D course reviews (see below). Facilitators used a three-point² scale to rate the following aspects of their performance during each course term: course climate and community building, instruction, Interaction and discussion facilitation, course organization, and implementation of assessments. Facilitators also used the logs to set goals and identify their strengths and weaknesses.

Reflection logs graduated from Level I (which asked facilitators to rate their own performance during a course; see Appendix C) to a Level II (which included Level I questions but also asked facilitators to reflect on their personalized course reviews; see Appendix D), indicating a completed Level I log and prior course review. Differentiated reflection logs provoke critical thinking that is appropriate for early career (Log Lv I) or more established (Log Lv II) online course facilitators while anchoring the 3D course review process. Table 2 summarizes the number of facilitators who completed Level I and II reflection logs during the study. Response rates higher among facilitators that completed Level II logs.

Table 2: National and local facilitators and completion rates

Term	Facilitators	Log Level I	Log Level II	Response rate
National - Fall 2009	59	47	*	80.0%
National - Winter 2010	62	14 (66.7%)	38 (92.7%)	83.9%
National - Spring 2010	64	10 (90.1%)	51 (96.2%)	95.3%
Local - Spring 2010	23	20	*	87.0%

² A 3-point scale was used during the Fall 2009, Winter 2010 and Spring 2010 terms. The 5-point scale was piloted during Summer 2010 and is advised for future use.

Post-Course Facilitator Interviews

As a follow-up activity to the reflection logs, 18 facilitators were selected to participate in a 15-20 minute telephone interview (Appendix E) that probed TeacherLine's facilitation support in greater detail. Interviews with national (n=9) and local (n=9) facilitators were conducted after the Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 terms respectively. National mentees were asked additional questions that specified the nature, duration and quality of their participation in TeacherLine's mentoring program for national facilitators. Feedback on the process of completing reflection logs was also collected during the interviews.

To select the 18 facilitators, all national and local facilitators that taught a TeacherLine course during the Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 terms respectively were assigned to one of three groups, each corresponding with the amount and type of professional development they have received from PBS TeacherLine to date: *Online Facilitator Training I* only, *Online Facilitator Training I plus Mentoring*, and *Online Facilitator Training I and II*. The first three facilitators to confirm interviews from each of the six groups, for a total of nine national and nine local facilitators, were interviewed.

Observation of Quarterly Faculty Meetings

Any professional development content related to online course facilitation that was conveyed during quarterly (pre-term) faculty meetings was observed and recorded for inclusion in PBS TeacherLine's model for supporting online course facilitators.

Post-Course Surveys of Online Course Learners

All learners were surveyed (Appendix F) at the end of each course term to determine the impact of online facilitation and the professional development that supports online facilitators on learners in TeacherLine courses. The post-course learner survey included scales for rating facilitator performance according to the same dimensions that facilitators and PBS TeacherLine used to assess facilitation as part of the 3D course reviews. Response rates on the learner surveys improved among national course facilitators as the study continued and, even at their lowest, were higher than surveys completed by local course learners (Table 3).

Table 3: National and local facilitators' learner survey completion rates

Term		Learners		
		n	Completed	Response rate
National	Fall 2009	1235	539	46.9%
	Winter 2010	1903	786	41.3%
	Spring 2010	1221	795	65.1%
Local	Spring 2010	336	130	38.7%

Strategic Support and Document Review

Throughout the yearlong study, PBS TeacherLine and research staff worked together to design measures that would be meaningful for facilitators to complete while also revealing insight about facilitators' professional development needs, performance and suggestions for improvements. The

collaboration continued with a definition of 3D course reviews and brainstorming ways to acquire the data needed to fully execute them in the most meaningful way. Ongoing partnership in the development, testing and refinement of all procedures and program components described in PBS TeacherLine's model has ensured that the formative assessments are fully applicable to and effective in the TeacherLine facilitation environment.

In an effort to identify program components that are most sustainable and transferable, an evaluative rubric that can be used to characterize the success of the TeacherLine facilitator support and evaluation program as a whole was also developed, pilot tested, and scored in a very preliminary way during this study (see below).

3. Data analysis

A focus on utilizing data collected from any and all sources during the study allowed for a multi-method understanding of the components of PBS TeacherLine's facilitation support program and their effectiveness. Quantitative data collected by surveys and through rubric ratings underwent descriptive and, where appropriate, inferential statistical analysis to identify and differentiate trends according to the study's initial goals. Qualitative data collected through interviews, observations and document review were coded and collated according to the themes identified by the initial literature review. Quantitative and qualitative data were compared to identify similarities and differences that inform the study's final conclusions.

3D Course Reviews

Each facilitator received a personalized course review (see Appendices G and H for sample Lv I and Lv II reviews respectively) that aligned feedback on a facilitator's efforts for the term from three perspectives: self, PBS TeacherLine, and learners (in aggregate) during each term of the study when they taught a course.

Program Rubric

The study's background survey, reflection logs, course reviews and post-course learner surveys contributed to the first draft of an evaluative rubric (Appendix I) that can be used to characterize the overall success of the TeacherLine facilitation support model. The rubric awards points in four key areas:

- Facilitator qualifications including degree(s) attained and prior experience as an online learner and instructor
- Facilitation performance as measured by the Associate Director of Online Facilitation and course learners
- Compliance with TL policies and guidelines
- Participation in the 3D review process

A final score can be used to differentiate facilitators using the hierarchical levels of '*Facilitator*', '*Distinguished Facilitator*', or '*Master Facilitator*'.

C. FINDINGS

Only high quality online instructors can provide high quality instruction. PBS TeacherLine ensures the best online facilitators by first selecting individuals who fit specific selection criteria (Figure 1), then

providing initial training and support through courses and mentoring. As facilitators mature in their tenure with TeacherLine, they have access to problem-based resources, support and collaboration through a professional learning community and 3D course review process that provide the annual data and real-time forum for ongoing data-driven practice.

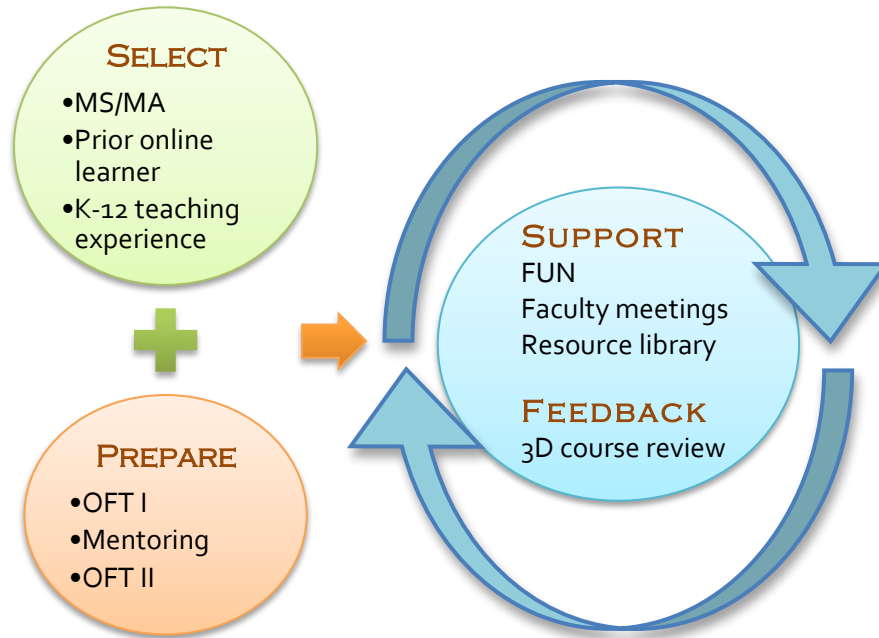


Figure 1: Key components of PBS TeacherLine’s facilitator support and evaluation model

PBS TeacherLine requires all online course facilitators to hold master’s degrees (16.3% hold CAS/EdS or PhD degrees) and have prior experience as online learners before facilitating a national course. At least one third of national course facilitators had enrolled in 30 or more online courses as learners before the Fall 2009 course term, and half had been teaching online for more than five years at that time. Local course facilitators are less experienced online learners than their national counterparts but are comparably experienced online instructors.

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At least one third of facilitators have enrolled in 30 or more online courses as learners, and **half have been teaching online for more than five years.**

Goal 1: Describe PBS TeacherLine’s model for preparing and supporting online course facilitators within the context of existing research-based and commonly used best practices.

Research-tested best practices for teacher professional development suggest that peer support and ongoing, embedded professional guidance for instructors are beneficial for meeting adult learners’ individualized needs. Further, peer mentoring, coaching and professional learning communities have proven to be effective channels for supporting online instructors who typically work in a geographically diverse and highly individualized environment such as online. PBS TeacherLine’s model embodies five research-based best practices for preparing and supporting online facilitators (Table 4) through components ranging from somewhat structured online courses to a more self-directed professional learning community for facilitators called the Facilitators’ United Network (FUN).

Table 4: Key elements of PBS TeacherLine’s facilitation support model that apply research-based best practices

Research-based best practices	PBS TeacherLine program component(s)
Peer support	Mentoring, FUN
Ongoing, embedded guidance	FUN, 3D course reviews
Problem-based	Mentoring, FUN, Assignments within <i>OFT I</i> and <i>OFT II</i> , Faculty meetings, 3D course reviews
Differentiated	Courses (<i>OFT I</i> and <i>II</i>), Mentoring, FUN, and 3D course reviews
Online	All facets take place online

New facilitators begin their initial preparation with PBS TeacherLine by enrolling in online courses that feature best practices for online instruction, and receive mentoring support while they teach their first online course. With more online teaching experience, facilitators move into an annual cycle of self-reflection and 3D course reviews that is designed to promote inquiry-based thinking about their professional practice and provide a forum for constructive professional relationships.

1. Preparing early facilitators: Online courses and mentoring to support online instruction

At the core of PBS TeacherLine’s facilitator training program is the importance of positioning online facilitators as learners themselves in the same asynchronous online learning environment that their own learners will experience when they enroll in a TeacherLine course. Facilitators’ immersion in interactive, multimedia online courses that feature best practices for online instruction provides a strong foundation for success as a TeacherLine facilitator.

PBS TeacherLine has created three distinct structured learning experiences: *Online Facilitator Training I: Mastering the Skills of Online Teaching (OFT I)*, in which all new facilitators enroll; *OFT I plus Mentoring*, throughout which facilitators conduct a national-level course with the aid of a mentor who supports and monitors this first facilitation effort; and *OFT II: Adjusting (or Dusting) Your Facilitator Hat*, which provides advanced research-based content to enrich the instruction of more experienced online facilitators.

RESEARCH

Facilitators are first immersed in **interactive, multimedia online courses** that feature best practices for online instruction, which provide a **strong foundation for success** at PBS TeacherLine.

In *OFT I: Mastering the Skills of Online Teaching*, facilitators that are new to PBS TeacherLine engage with course content delivered in an asynchronous environment that includes online discussions and collaboration with other facilitators-in-training. *OFT I*’s course content includes a variety of fundamental concepts and practices such as:

- Philosophy and pedagogy of online learning
- Techniques for deepening online discussion
- Techniques for online, text-based communication
- Strategies to foster online community building and collaborative learning
- Strategies for delivering effective, formative online assessment
- PBS TeacherLine’s course facilitation and administration policies
- Strategies for evaluating Web-based resources

In a follow-up professional development experience with *OFT I plus Mentoring*, new facilitators undertake the leadership of their own national course with the guidance and support of an experienced TeacherLine facilitator mentor. Mentors, while non-evaluative in their role, provide valuable feedback and affirmation for beginning TeacherLine facilitators. This mentoring takes shape through a multi-faceted mentor role in which the mentor acts as an onlooker to facilitator-learner communications, advisor for consultation regarding learner questions, a partner in dialog regarding best practices, and resource sharer to the facilitator. An accompanying checklist provides structured guidance for the mentor-facilitator relationship.

A third level of structured professional development is PBS TeacherLine’s second online course for facilitators, *OFT II: Adjusting (or Dusting) Your Facilitator Hat*. *OFT II* provides more experienced facilitators with additional research-based information about facilitating online courses and a medium through which they can practice their techniques and skills. *OFT II* fosters data-driven practice through facilitators’ analysis of their own previous course evaluations or a case of online learning. The addition of data-driven reflective practice that is embedded into *OFT II* advances facilitators’ independent path toward excellence, supporting their needs as adult learners who require both thorough information and analytic tools in order to improve themselves in self-directed ways. Nearly sixty percent of national facilitators (59.4%) and a third of local facilitators (30.5%) have completed both OFTI and OFTII. (Table 5.)

RESEARCH

The **data-driven reflective practice** embedded into *OFT II* advances facilitators toward **excellence** by featuring both thorough information and cutting-edge analytic tools.

Table 5: Facilitators’ completion of initial professional development offered by PBS TeacherLine

Professional Development	Local Facilitators		National Facilitators		Local and National Facilitators
	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Total Count
Tier 1: Online Facilitator Training I	62.2%	51	18.8%	19	70
Tier 2: Online Facilitator Training I plus mentoring	4.0%	4	11.9%	12	16
Tier 3: Online Facilitator Training II	30.5%	25	59.4%	60	85

*The 10 national and 23 local facilitators that did not complete the background survey are excluded from this data.

- Ongoing, embedded support for national and local course facilitators: Faculty meetings, FUN and resource library

Supplementing *OFT I*, *OFT II* and mentoring are embedded learning opportunities through faculty meetings, a professional learning community of TeacherLine facilitators (FUN), and a resource library that support facilitators’ ongoing information needs in real time. Quarterly faculty meetings conducted by the Associate Director of Online Facilitation are held via webinar with a conference call-style audio component and serve three primary purposes. First, they provide all facilitators who are teaching during a given course term with the opportunity to hear each other’s voices and connect briefly before the course term begins. Second, a presenter offers a new technique, skill or idea that facilitators can apply immediately in their upcoming courses. Finally, the faculty meetings provide a medium for updates, logistical issues and reminders about PBS TeacherLine that are relevant to facilitators.

The FUN offers an online professional learning community that is available to all PBS TeacherLine course facilitators, and exists almost entirely as a self-directed forum for TeacherLine facilitators. The FUN supplements facilitators' work and provides just-in-time professional development to them by reinforcing good communication and providing access to static information that is present whenever they need it. Although nearly four in ten national facilitators are lurkers who refer to the FUN to gain information and/or networking more than they contribute to the site, national facilitators describe the value of having access to exchanges on the FUN even if they do not actively participate in discussions that take place there. Three in ten facilitators feel the manager-moderated FUN is essential to their success as a TeacherLine course facilitator. Local course facilitators are less active in the FUN than national facilitators, and the value they place on the FUN is correspondingly lower.

"The sample templates, responses, and documents that experienced facilitators provide in the FUN are extremely helpful. The responses in the FUN [discussions] are very helpful, as well."
– National Facilitator

Also available to support facilitators is a library of documents that can be easily downloaded, printed, and/or referred to at any time through the facilitator information page/resources library embedded into the course management system. Nearly all facilitators (96.8 percent) utilize the resource library at some point during the courses they lead, and most (60.7 percent) access the library at least weekly.

3. Data-driven performance feedback and formative evaluation: 3D course reviews

Newly designed 3D course reviews position three perspectives on an evaluator's performance during a course – facilitator/self, PBS TL and learners – side by side for an individualized account of facilitation strengths and areas of needed improvement. The 3D course reviews are designed to increase dialogue about high-quality online instruction and generate a culture of inquiry among facilitators. During the study, every national course facilitator received a course review after each term that(s) taught. Since this was too frequent to conduct a thorough evaluation of each facilitator, it makes the most sense going forward for new facilitators to receive two course reviews during their first year and only one review during subsequent calendar years.

Goal 2: Determine the effectiveness of PBS TeacherLine's model for preparing and supporting high-quality online course facilitators

1. Part 1: Determining the effectiveness of PBS TeacherLine's facilitator support model

PBS TeacherLine continually strives to support high-quality online facilitation by regularly evaluating and updating their professional development content and mode(s) of delivery. Post-hoc assessments of the quality of PBS TeacherLine's professional development offerings and facilitator competencies cannot establish a causal relationship between the two. However, facilitators rate the quality of PBS TeacherLine's professional development and support they receive as online course facilitators very highly; superior to most of the preparation they have received offered by agencies other than PBS TeacherLine. Further, facilitators have very few unmet specific learning needs related to online facilitation, which suggests an adequate scope of support provided by PBS TeacherLine.

Facilitators' Ratings of the Quality of Professional Development Offered by TeacherLine

While facilitator competencies cannot be solely attributed to PBS TeacherLine's professional development offerings, facilitators consistently indicated during the research that *OFT I, OFT I plus*

Mentoring, and *OFT II* prepared them to immediately apply the content conveyed during the professional development they received. Regardless of gender, years of experience as an online teacher or learner, geographic location, age, primary occupation, hours of professional development received for online facilitation or whether they have successfully completed *OFT I*, *OFT I plus mentoring* or *OFT I and II*, facilitators consistently feel well-prepared by PBS TeacherLine to immediately implement most aspects of good online course facilitation (Table 6) once they complete *OFT I* and *OFT II*.

Table 6: Effectiveness of *OFT I* and *OFT II* for supporting online facilitation

Area*	Mean**
Course climate and community building	2.9
Instruction	2.8
Interaction and discussion facilitation	2.8
Course organization	2.8
Implementation of assessments	2.9
Other***	2.9

*Subcategories for each of 6 broader dimensions were combined

* *3 = PBS TeacherLine training prepared me to implement this immediately

2 = PBS TeacherLine training gave me good ideas on how to start, but I am not ready to implement

1 = PBS TeacherLine training covered this topic but I don't feel at all prepared to apply it in my teaching

0 = I have not received any training from PBS TeacherLine on this

***Other category included TeacherLine's course facilitation administration and policies; and the facilitator information page

Both the content and format of *OFT I* were reviewed positively by facilitators-in-training, with descriptions such as "outstanding, dynamic, and relevant" provided by satisfied participants. Facilitators valued the online discussions as preparation for their leadership of online discussions in their own future courses, with one facilitator describing the discussions as "the heart of all TeacherLine courses where teaching a learning meet to form a true community of professional learners."

The non-hierarchical mentoring relationship established between experienced and new facilitators after *OFT I* is complete offers mentors and mentees a medium through which specific and real-time support can evolve in a non-hierarchical, one-on-one relationship. Both mentors and mentees appreciate the mutual affirmation and problem solving that take place within the relationship. Many mentors and mentees cite their mentoring relationship as the most positive aspect of PBS TeacherLine's facilitator support and evaluation model.

"My mentor affirmed that my instincts were correct, which I really needed. She also covered content that *OFT I* couldn't be providing examples of correspondence with learners that I couldn't find in other places. Sometimes there's a situation that we just didn't cover in *OFT I* and having my mentor's support as I worked through it was invaluable to me."

– National Facilitator

After *OFT I* and *OFT II* are complete, facilitators' primary mode of professional development is the 3D course review process. Facilitators use their 3D reviews in a variety of ways, most commonly to identify their strengths and weaknesses or to improve in some way. Two in three facilitators rated the course reviews as 'very useful' and the remaining 14 considered their review to be 'somewhat useful'. Eighty-five percent of facilitators think the course review process is effective 'as is' without the need for any updating or changing. At least 30 percent of local facilitators would welcome a course review process that provides them with specific feedback about their performance as an online course instructor. Of

these, 81.2 percent say that implementing a course review process is the most important way that PBS TeacherLine could improve.

Facilitators’ Ratings of the Quality of Professional Development and Support Offered by Agencies Other Than PBS TeacherLine

While the quality of PBS TeacherLine’s online facilitation cannot be solely attributed to the quality of the preparation offered by PBS TeacherLine, few other providers offer a program that is as comprehensive or as highly rated by facilitators as TeacherLine’s. (Table 7)

Table 7: Facilitators’ ratings of professional development for online facilitation offered by agencies other than PBS TeacherLine

To what extent do you feel you have received:	Inadequate	Adequate	Exemplary
Opportunities through a service other than TeacherLine to deepen the knowledge necessary to be a more effective online facilitator	52.2% (n=48)	33.7% (n=31)	14.1% (n=13)
Opportunities through a service other than TeacherLine to deepen the skills necessary to be a more effective online facilitator	54.3% (n=50)	32.6% (n=30)	13.0% (n=12)

Two in three (67.7 percent) PBS TeacherLine course facilitators are *aware* of professional development for online facilitation that is offered by a service other than TeacherLine, and approximately half of these (51.2 percent) have *enrolled* in non-TeacherLine professional development. Facilitators primarily describe the impact of this professional development as improving some aspect of their communication with learners as a result of their enrollment.

RESEARCH

Few other providers offer a program that is as **comprehensive** or as **highly rated** by facilitators as TeacherLine’s.

Facilitators’ Unmet Professional Development Needs

Yet another way to understand the relationship between the quality of PBS TeacherLine’s professional development for online facilitation and online instructor quality is to ask facilitators about unmet professional development needs that they feel would enhance their performance as online instructors. In general, facilitators surveyed had low or no needs for further professional development.

2. Defining *effective* facilitators

Current research on best practices for high-quality online course instruction suggests facilitator competencies that can be broadly categorized into six areas: course climate and community building, instruction, interaction and discussion facilitation, course organization, implementation of assessments and other (e.g. compliance with TeacherLine’s procedures). PBS TeacherLine’s support and evaluation model has been designed to gather feedback from multiple perspectives to address each of these areas.

RESEARCH

Research describes how online course instructors that facilitate the delivery of content developed by others should have their **performance evaluated separately from elements of course design.**

PBS TeacherLine facilitator performance during a course term is assessed in three ways: by facilitators through reflection logs, by PBS TeacherLine’s Associate Director for Online Facilitation using an evaluative rubric (Appendix J), and by learners who complete post-course learner surveys that, in aggregate, provide a third perspective on facilitator performance. All feedback on a facilitator’s

performance from each source is aggregated into one document and returned to facilitators through annual 3D course reviews.

Facilitators’ Self-Assessments

As a whole, PBS TeacherLine’s online course facilitators excel at many key competencies that are consistent with current research on effective online facilitation skills (Table 7).

Table 7: PBS TeacherLine facilitators’ stated strengths, paired with research-based competencies for effective online facilitation

Research-based best practices	PBS TeacherLine facilitators
Encouraging active learning and participation in the online course	Connecting with learners so they feel engaged
Communicating expectations clearly and effectively	Communicating effectively, including setting clear expectations for course success
Experiencing online learning from the perspective of an online learner	Ability to step into the shoes of their learners
Differentiating instruction to meet the specific learning needs of individual students	Ability to work with learners who have different levels of familiarity with technology and content
Online instructors have prior experience as online learners	100% of online facilitators have prior experience as online learners

Facilitators also articulated areas for improvement in their own performance, which converged across course terms:

- Landscape posts
- Presence on the discussion board
- Providing constructive, valuable, and specific feedback to learners
- Time management
- Adding web 2.0 functionality to course delivery

Across terms, facilitators participating in the self-assessment process for the first time (and using a Level I log) rated their performance more favorably than their counterparts who, having previously completed Level I logs, completed Level II reflection logs. This was true of both national and local facilitators. Since a greater proportion of facilitators completed Level II logs each term, this likely accounts for much of why facilitators’ self-assessment ratings decreased slightly in most performance areas with each successive term (see Table 8). Further, content analysis of open-ended question responses in the Level II reflection logs reveals deeper questioning and a more robust performance critique when facilitators answered questions about the data presented in course reviews. These findings suggest that participation in the 3D course review process promotes critical self-reflection, with facilitators gaining the capacity to critically assess their performance over time.

RESEARCH

Participation in PBS TeacherLine’s 3D course review process promotes critical self-reflection, with facilitators **gaining the capacity to critically assess their performance over time.**

Table 8: Aggregate self-assessment of national facilitator performance during Fall 2009, Winter 2010 and Spring 2010 course terms

	Fall 2009 mean ¹	Winter 2010 mean ²	Spring 2010 mean ²
Course climate and community building	2.9	2.6	2.6
Instruction	2.7	2.6	2.6
Interaction and discussion facilitation	2.7	2.6	2.4
Course organization	2.9	2.6	2.6
Implementation of assessments	2.7	2.6	2.6

1: 3 = Excellent 2 = Satisfactory 1 = Needs improvement

2: Level I and Level II log data combined

PBS TeacherLine's Assessment of Facilitator Performance

PBS TeacherLine's Associate Director of Online Facilitation also evaluated every facilitator during each of the four study terms that (s)he taught a course. PBS TL's evaluation rubric used the same six elements of good online instruction as those featured in the facilitator self-reflection and learner surveys. Artifacts such as discussion board activity, landscape posts, and learner assessment dialogue represented facilitator and learner activity during the course, and were reviewed and rated using the evaluation rubric to determine the quality of a facilitator's performance. These evaluations paint a picture of high-quality facilitation across all six dimensions of online teaching examined through the evaluation process (see Table 9). PBS TeacherLine tended to rate national course facilitators more favorably than local course facilitators.

Table 9: PBS TeacherLine's rating of facilitator performance across course terms

Facilitation Competency	Fall 2009 mean ¹	Winter 2010 mean ¹	Spring 2010 mean ¹
Course climate and community building	2.9	2.9	3.0
Instruction	2.9	2.9	2.9
Interaction and discussion facilitation	2.9	2.9	2.9
Course organization	2.9	3.0	3.0
Implementation of Assessments	2.7	2.9	2.9

1: 3 = Excellent 2 = Satisfactory 1 = Needs improvement

Goal 3: Measure the connection between TeacherLine facilitator effectiveness and the overall course experience for learners.

Learner evaluations, examined in aggregate across facilitators and terms, also reveal high quality facilitation. While learners' aggregate mean ratings in three areas were slightly lower than those of TeacherLine's evaluations (instruction, interaction and discussion facilitation, and course organization), there is high overall agreement between learners' and PBS TeacherLine's ratings of facilitator performance quality. Learners' satisfaction with course experiences and their descriptions of facilitator excellence reinforce these findings. Learner ratings of their facilitators were very similar for national and local courses.

"Our facilitator] discussed how she uses technology as a teacher, creating an environment of modeling vs. "do what I say." She walks the walk! [She] was very timely with grading projects and thorough on her very personalized comments."

– Learner

Table 10: Learners' evaluations of facilitator performance

Facilitation Competency	Fall 2009 mean ¹	Winter 2010 mean ¹	Spring 2010 mean ¹
Course climate and community building	2.9	2.9	2.8
Instruction	2.8	2.8	2.7
Interaction and discussion facilitation	2.8	2.8	2.8
Course organization	2.8	2.8	2.7
Implementation of Assessments	2.8	2.8	2.8

1: 3 = Excellent 2 = Satisfactory 1 = Needs improvement

1. Putting it all together: Relating facilitator performance and learner outcomes

PBS TeacherLine and learners consistently rated facilitators' performance more favorably than facilitators rated themselves (Table 11).

Table 11: Aggregate ratings of facilitator performance during yearlong study

Facilitation	Mean facilitator self-rating ¹	Mean PBS TL rating ¹	Mean learner rating ¹
Course climate and community building	2.7	2.9	2.9
Instruction	2.6	2.9	2.8
Interaction and discussion facilitation	2.6	2.9	2.8
Course organization	2.7	2.8	2.8
Implementation of Assessments	2.6	3.0	2.8

1: 3 = Excellent 2 = Satisfactory 1 = Needs improvement

Even more compelling than three cycles of learner data confirming excellent facilitator performance is the likelihood that many facilitators will enroll in another TeacherLine course, recommend TeacherLine courses to their colleagues, and immediately apply what they learned from TeacherLine courses as a result of their facilitator's performance (Table 12).

Table 12: Likelihood of national learners' future actions based on their fall 2009, winter 2010 and spring 2010 facilitators' performance

Because of this facilitator's knowledge and skills I will:	Fall 2009 mean ¹ (n=579)	Fall 2009 stdev	Winter 2010 mean ¹ (n=786)	Winter 2010 stdev	Spring 2010 mean ¹ (n=795)	Spring 2010 stdev
Take another TeacherLine course	3.3	0.84	3.4	0.81	3.3	0.85
Take another TeacherLine course from this facilitator	3.4	0.91	3.5	0.90	3.3	1.00
Be able to apply what I learned immediately in my professional practice	3.6	0.76	3.7	0.65	3.6	0.70
Stay connected with other learners beyond this course	2.1	1.12	2.2	1.08	2.1	1.13
Recommend this course to a colleague or friend	3.3	0.93	3.4	0.92	3.3	1.01

Recommend a TeacherLine course to a colleague or friend	3.5	0.76	3.6	0.79	3.5	0.81
Recommend a TeacherLine course taught by this facilitator to a colleague or friend	3.4	0.92	3.5	0.89	3.3	0.99
Seek training on how to be a TeacherLine course facilitator	2.0	1.25	2.0	1.23	1.9	1.29

1: 4 = Absolutely, 3 = I am pretty sure I would, 2 = I might consider it, 1 = I doubt it, 0 = Definitely not

Goal 4: Determine the scalability and transferability of PBS TeacherLine model for other providers of online courses nationwide.

An evaluative rubric was also developed during the study to synthesize facilitator performance feedback and characterize PBS TeacherLine’s overall model for supporting and evaluating online course facilitators. The rubric awards points for a combination of facilitator qualifications (11 points) and performance (31 points) using assessment data provided by PBS TeacherLine, learners, and the facilitators themselves. The program evaluation rubric integrates data from multiple sources and provides a comprehensive picture of TeacherLine facilitator quality. The rubric can also be used to inform PBS TeacherLine of those facilitators that have shown a superior or distinguished record in online facilitation (see Appendix K for each current facilitator’s rubric score). Application of the rubric to the 2009-2010 online facilitators that participated in the research shows more than one third (37.2%) of TeacherLine facilitators displaying superior quality facilitation and achieving *Master Facilitator* status. Another 21.3 percent achieved *Distinguished Facilitator* status (Table 13).

Table 13: Proportions of facilitators who achieved *Master* and *Distinguished* status

Title	Rubric raw score	Percent	Count
<i>Master Facilitator</i>	34-38 points	37.2%	35
<i>Distinguished Facilitator</i>	17-33 points	21.3%	20
<i>Facilitator</i>	0-16 points	41.5%	39
Total		100.0%	94

These findings suggest that up to 40 percent of PBS TeacherLine’s facilitators would benefit from additional support and/or professional development in order to improve their performance, as characterized by both PBS TeacherLine and course learners. Facilitators revealed during the research study that PBS TeacherLine’s future efforts to assure high facilitator quality should include the following components:

- **Embedded and problem-based:** An immediate application (e.g. a course, problematic learner) for the content conveyed through professional development is essential to 34 (or 36.2% of) facilitators.
- **Research-tested strategies:** Evidence of the positive impact on a course provided by a professional development concept is essential to 87 (or 92.6% of) facilitators.
- **Hands-on format with extensive modeling:**

RESEARCH

Up to 40 percent of PBS TeacherLine’s facilitators would benefit from additional support and/or professional development in order to improve their performance, as characterized by both PBS TeacherLine and course learners.

Guided practice with using new techniques and/or technologies is essential to 89 (or 94.7% of) facilitators.

Other providers of professional development and feedback to online course facilitators should consider applying many of the research-tested best practices that PBS TeacherLine utilizes such as:

- Selecting online course facilitators that have prior, recent experience as online learners.
- Professional development for facilitators that is offered in multiple formats and integrates peer support with problem-based, embedded learning.
- Clearly stated performance expectations and evaluation criteria that originate with research-based best practices for high quality online instruction.
- Timely and iterative feedback on facilitator performance from multiple perspectives.
- Accurate measurement of feedback about the quality and effectiveness of professional development and feedback provided.

Together, these features can create a culture of ongoing learning and excellence among course facilitators, facilitator leaders and learners that has proven effective for PBS TeacherLine.

Goal 5: Develop instruments and guidelines for using the instruments that can be used as ongoing professional development experiences among TeacherLine facilitators.

The following instruments were used during this study:

Program-level:

- Program rubric
- Background survey

Facilitator-level:

- Reflection log Lv I
- Reflection log Lv II
- Facilitator interviews
- Post-course learner survey
- TL course review rubric

The document *Facilitation Evaluation Guidelines* (Appendix L) explains the procedures and protocol for using these instruments to conduct the facilitation support and evaluation program described in this report.