



*Improving  
Distance  
Education  
for Adult  
Learners*

*Working Paper No. 5*

# A Pilot Test of Study Groups: Professional Development for Experienced Distance Teachers

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Project IDEAL is a consortium of states working together to develop effective distance education programs for adult learners. The Project IDEAL Support Center at the University of Michigan provides technical support in the areas of teacher training, research design, data collection, data analysis and reporting. It also produces working papers on topics of importance to distance education. Through collaborative research and practice, we are working to provide quality distance education for adult learners across the country.

<http://projectideal.org>

Project IDEAL is a consortium of adult education agencies in 15 states that share the goal of testing the potential of distance education to meet the needs of ABE adults for whom classroom options are either not available or not a good fit. Few if any adult educators have experience teaching at a distance. When a member state launches a distance experiment they need to train teachers in the mechanics of distance education: recruiting learners who will study primarily at a distance, orienting learners to the task of studying alone, teaching at a distance (supporting learners in a faceless relationship), and assessing student progress.

To help state agencies with this professional development effort the Project IDEAL Support Center at the University of Michigan developed a Handbook of Distance Education for Adult Learners and a facilitated online course in distance teaching called D101. Spread over an eight-week period, D101 is designed to familiarize teachers with the mechanics of distance education and support them as they develop a plan tailored to the unique demands of the geographic area they will be serving.

Teachers who have mastered these basics are ready to think in a more focused way about pedagogy—how to support learners effectively in their course of study. To assist with this professional development activity the Support Center developed a second online course called Study Groups. It is designed to help teachers deepen their understanding of a variety of learning problems exhibited by ABE students and expand each teacher’s repertoire of solutions. In addition to the immediate learning that could be gained from the Study Group activities, the model was designed with two other goals in mind. Because Study Groups are conducted almost entirely on the Internet, participants would gain additional experience with being learners at a distance. The other goal was to build a “community of practice” among participants, providing each participant with the support of a group of like-minded professionals that could be called on after the Study Group was finished to help solve new teaching-learning problems when they arise.

Study Groups are intended for teachers with at least six months experience teaching at a distance. The model was developed and pilot-tested in the 2003-2004 school year. This paper describes how a Study Group works and reports on the results of the pilot test.

### **What is a Study Group?**

A Study Group consists of 6-10 distance teachers and a trained facilitator. Each participant develops a case study of a difficult pedagogical problem he or she has faced. In the pilot test participants were all teaching GED Connection—a multimedia GED preparation course distributed by Kentucky Educational Television. GED Connection has video, print, and online components. Accordingly, the case studies all dealt with problems faced by adults using this curriculum to prepare for the math, science, reading, writing or social studies subtests of the GED.

In a Study Group participants analyze and discuss each case under the guidance of a facilitator who has responsibility for helping participants refine their analytical skills and encouraging them to develop solutions to the problems identified in each case. The discussion takes place using a web-based electronic discussion board. A discussion board is similar to email, except that all of the messages on a particular topic are

displayed in full and in chronological order, simulating an on-going verbal discussion. Whenever participants log in to the discussion board they can read all of the comments to date and then add their own comment or pose a question. The asynchronous nature of the discussion allows participants to participate and meet the course requirements as their schedule permits. In a typical study group, each participant downloads and reads the assigned case study (or studies) once or twice a week. Then they log into the discussion board and contribute their analysis and proposed solutions. In the pilot test participants were required to log in at least twice a week and make at least two contributions each time. They could respond to the case under discussion or add a new resource to the website's library of teaching tips.

Prior to the formal launch of a Study Group, participants receive a packet with detailed instructions, a sample case study, and a template they can use to create their own case study. The facilitator contacts each participant and provides assistance—if needed—in preparing the case study. The facilitator also familiarizes each participant with the Study Group website and the various online tools that are used to discuss the cases.

The Study Group formally begins with a 90-minute conference call to familiarize participants with one another and to model the types of questions and comments that are appropriate in a Study Group. The discussion is built around the sample case study. The facilitator plays an active role in shaping this oral conversation. In the two days that follow the call participants try to reproduce the oral discussion online. This helps them become comfortable with the electronic discussion tool and provides an opportunity to practice “faceless” communication and adjust to its limitations.

### **Discourse in a Study Group**

Below are five exchanges from a discussion thread that had a total of 11 exchanges. They illustrate the character of a discussion—asking clarifying questions and suggesting possible resources. They also illustrate the role the facilitator plays in managing the group and keeping participants on task.

*Msg 1. The facilitator starts the discussion of Judy's case study with a request to Judy*

The first 'posting' is the core question at the end of Judy's case study. Judy, go ahead and copy that paragraph here for your first posting, and feel free to ask additional questions, or give us any additional information you think will help us.

*Msg 2. Judy explains the problem*

Re: My GED student Chris. The major problem that I see is that she really doesn't get enough practice. She is a bit intimidated by the Geometry. She scored 77% on the GED Practice test, but is very uncomfortable with the terminology. I've directed her to Math.com and suggested she view the video as well. There is one specific math problem I would like to be able to explain better--slope. If anyone can help me with this I would be most appreciative.

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### *Msg 5. A Study Group member helps the author understand her student's problem and identifies resources that could help.*

Hi Judy, You really didn't say whether your learner has any background in algebra, but I would assume that she does have some knowledge of this subject because of her 77% on the online practice test. Does she know how to plug numbers into formulas? Can she already plot coordinates on a graph? Those are probably the most important prerequisites to learning slope. Since your learner has a good reading level, I would recommend the Steck-Vaughn algebra and geometry packets for her. These should familiarize her with the terminology she needs. (Did you know that the Learner Resources link in GEDC has a link to a printable GED formula page?) Also, since she really seems to like to work online, you can send her to <http://www.purplemath.com/modules/>. There is a whole page of links to lessons for algebra and geometry topics. I checked out the one it offers on slope of a line at <http://www.purplemath.com/modules/slope.htm>, and it presents slope in straightforward, not-too-technical terminology. I hope this helps. I understand that you needed help YESTERDAY!

### *Msg 9. The facilitator manages resources*

Patty and Kathy, We are getting some great ideas here, but I want to make sure they get into the Contributions section of the website. Would you post each website link there also? You can simply copy and paste what you've written here. I don't want to 'lose' any of the information for other teachers. Thanks! Oh, that reminds me. We have two other questions that "came in" on my email from the "field". I'll try to post them this evening. This pilot is really generating a lot of excitement from other teachers hoping to do the same thing. (Just thought you'd like to know how it feels to be pioneers:):)

### *Msg 11. The author reports success*

Thank you to all who took the time to help me with my "slope" problem. Kathy sent me a detailed email with definitions and a step-by-step explanation which was very helpful. Patty passed on info regarding the McGraw Hill/Contemporary disposable exercise books (ISBN# is 0-8092-3649-4) and Anita shared information about the Contemporary GED Math, and the Steck-Vaughn algebra and geometry packets. She also directed me to a web site ([www.purplemath.com/modules/](http://www.purplemath.com/modules/)) with a page of links to algebra and geometry topics. I am pleased to report that Chris (the student) has completed all the work in the mathematics workbook and is scheduled to take the GED test this month.

It is unusual that so few exchanges are needed to diagnose a learning problem, identify remedial materials, and have a learner profit from them so quickly. Typical discussions are likely to require about 25 exchanges.

## The Pilot Tests

Staff from the Project IDEAL Support Center (Jere Johnston, Leslie Petty and Deb Walker) developed the materials and process for Study Groups in collaboration with three facilitators that had extensive experience facilitating Distance Learning 101 and other online support activities: Deb Walker, Kim McCoy, and Sara Plantz. Study Group participants were recruited from Ohio and Pennsylvania by Kim McCoy and Sara Plantz—Distance Learning Coordinators for their respective states. Anticipating the Study Group experiment, they had built into the 2004 contract for distance education the expectation that teachers would participate in one Study Group during the year.

Deb Walker led the first Study Group. Conference calls among all of the designers were used to plan for and then debrief the process. Kim and Sara were able to look in on the Study Group website so they could follow the process to help them prepare for their own Study Groups several months later.

<b>Facilitator</b>	<b>Period</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Curriculum Focus</b>
Deb Walker	Nov – Dec 2003	6 PA & OH Teachers	GED Connection
Kim McCoy	Mar – April 2004	8 PA & OH Teachers	GED Connection
Sara Plantz	Mar – April 2004	9 PA & OH Teachers	GED Connection

Participants in each Study Group completed an online survey before and after their Study Group experience. The findings from the second round of Study Groups (McCoy and Plantz) are reported below. Additional data comes from an archive of the discussions and resource collections of each Study Group.

### Calendar and Estimated Effort

Participants can expect to spend about 18 hours to complete a Study Group, distributed as shown in the table below. Participants who complete a Study Group can earn 1.8 C.E.U.s from the University of Michigan.

Estimated Effort for Study Group Participants

<b>Activity</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Approximate Effort</b>
Each participant creates a personal case study and is helped to become re-acquainted with the online discussion board	A two-week period before the Study Group begins	3 hours
Get-acquainted conference call		1-1/2 hours
Weekly online assignments	3-5 weeks	3 hours per week
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>About 18 hours</b>

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A facilitator can expect to spend 60-80 hours to facilitate a single Study Group. The three facilitators in the pilot study estimate that it would take less time when facilitating a Group for a second time.

Estimated Effort for the Study Group Facilitator

<b>Activity</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Approximate Effort For 6-10 Participants</b>
Facilitator training		4-5 hours
Set up the course: recruit participants, set up the course website, send out course materials and pre-course assessment, acquaint participants with the expectations for the course, adjust the course website, create a system for keeping in touch with participants and keeping track of their work.	Before the Study Group begins	10 hours
Assist each participant in creating a case study and becoming re-acquainted with the CommunityZero web tools	Before the Study Group begins	8-15 hours
Get-acquainted conference call		1-1/2 hours (or 3 hours if two calls are required)
Facilitate discussion of the practice case study, upload actual case studies to the website, determine order case studies will be posted and let each participant know when their case study will be posted.		2-3 hours
Weekly facilitation	3-5 weeks	30-40 hours
Wrap-up and consolidation of materials on Study Group website	After the last week	3 hours
TOTAL		59 – 79 hours

**Who Participated?**

Each of the Study Groups had participants from both Ohio and Pennsylvania. Each Study Group was composed of teachers with experience teaching adult learners that ranged from one year to more than five years, and a similar range of experience in preparing adults for the GED. Three quarters of the teachers had taught GED Connection for two-three years (the other quarter were in their first year teaching this curriculum).

Half of the group had participated in a Study Group before and almost everyone reported that they had easy access to the Internet at convenient times. More than half reported comfort with using a computer, including accessing a website as well as uploading and downloading files—the key skills required for participation. Before the Study Group began forty percent reported that they needed practice with online discussion.

## **About the Study Group Surveys**

In this report the narrative is built around the pre- and post-surveys completed by participants in the McCoy and Plantz Study Groups. The letter x denotes the pre-survey and the letter y the post-survey. The number following x and y (for example x10 or y7) indicate the number of the question. The surveys with detailed response frequencies can be found in the appendix.

## **Felt Need for a Study Group**

An assumption of professional development in general, and of Study Groups in particular, is that teachers have a continuing need for modest levels of assistance in coping with learners that evidence difficulty in learning various concepts or skills. The challenge is to find a source of support proportionate to the teacher's need. What kind of need did participants show? Seventy-two percent reported that they *occasionally* or *quite often* encountered a student having a learning problem for which they didn't have a solution (x10). Most participants reported that they found teaching GED Connection *challenging in a few areas* or *quite difficult* (x7). Finally, three quarters of the participants reported that they found it *somewhat challenging* to provide one-on-one instruction around topics with which a student has difficulty (x9e).

When asked how often they talked with colleagues about distance teaching situations or problems, half the group said they did this *quite often* and another third said *occasionally* (x11). The most common sources they turned to were "teachers in my building," "an administrator in my center," "the teachers guide," and "speakers at conferences or workshops." The source turned to least often was "teachers other than those in my building."

## **Electronic Discussion vs. Telephone**

The Study Group started with a 90-minute telephone conference call. Half rated this *very useful*, while the other half rated it as *a little useful*. After the initial call, all discussion was carried on using the electronic discussion board built into the Study Group website. How adequate is a tool like this for carrying on discourse over teaching-learning problems? No one reported that it was inadequate, 19% reported that it was a little challenging, and 81% indicated that *it was adequate* (y14). In a more direct question, participants were asked: "Some people are very comfortable typing their thoughts; others find this to be an awkward way to communicate. How comfortable are you with typing as a way to communicate your ideas?" Sixty-three percent said they were *very comfortable* and 38% said they were *somewhat comfortable* (y16).

In a follow-up question they were asked if they were enrolled in another Study Group "would your preference be to meet by telephone at a preset time each week or use an electronic discussion where you could check in and discuss topics at your convenience?" Every participant chose the discussion board. When asked why, virtually everyone said their schedules wouldn't permit an activity at a preset time. The sentiment was captured in this response: "My schedule makes it difficult to set aside a time to meet with others via telephone. Electronic discussion allows me to make use of free time in between my

other obligations without needing to bend to the scheduling needs of the other participants.” Three participants mentioned the additional advantage of being able to think more clearly when typing: “I am able to communicate more accurately if I am typing/writing rather than verbalizing on the spot.”

In general, participants were comfortable using the technological tools. “Were there any technical aspects of the Study Group (adding your case study, making a Contribution, posting a reply to a discussion, etc.) that were confusing or difficult to you?” Only 3 participants mentioned any problems and these were very minor (y22).

### **Time Spent**

Participants were asked to log into the site at least twice a week; the majority reported that they logged in three times (59%) or more (18%) (y19). They were told to expect to spend 2-3 hours per week on assignments; 44% reported spending two hours and another 31% reported spending three hours (y20). About the same number reported that the time they spent was a reasonable amount, though one quarter thought a reasonable amount of time was one hour or less (y21).

The design of an electronic discussion tool is important, but the discussion itself needs to have a certain rhythm of give and take before it qualifies as a true discussion.

Participants were asked: “To be a true ‘discussion’ many people need to contribute their ideas. In the course of one week, how often should a participant expect to log on and contribute to make the discussion valuable?” The modal answer was twice (59%) while another third (35%) felt three or more times. So setting the expectation of at least two logins per week seems appropriate.

While the main reason to login was to participate in a discussion, there were two other reasons. One was to download and read the case(s) for the week. The other was to add to a resource area of the website a case study summary. Below is the summary that one participant prepared at the conclusion of his case discussion. It doesn’t capture the knowledge learned about why learners have problems learning this subject matter, but it does illustrate the remedies that were suggested by participants.

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### Summary - Teaching Science Concepts (electricity) at a Distance

Rate: ✓

by Tony Buffone, ARIN IU28

### Resources for Science Concepts (electricity) at a Distance

#### *Supplemental Workbook Exercises*

- Steck-Vaughn had a lower level science book called *The Wonders of Science* (Matter, Motion, and Machines)
- *Reading and Critical Thinking in the Content Areas*
- KET GEDC pre-GED workbooks

#### *Practice Websites*

- [www.brainpop.com](http://www.brainpop.com)
- [www.explorescience.com](http://www.explorescience.com)
- [www.west.net](http://www.west.net)
- [www.exploratorium.edu/science\\_explorer](http://www.exploratorium.edu/science_explorer)
- [www.floridatechnet.org](http://www.floridatechnet.org)
- [www.funsci.com](http://www.funsci.com)
- <http://puzzlemaker.school.discovery.com/>

#### *Supplemental Videos*

- Disney's Bill Nye the Science Guy

#### *Supplemental Software*

- None suggested

### Strategies for Teaching Science Concepts (electricity) at a Distance

- Conduct face to face lab lesson
- Suggest home experiments to try
- Internet site science practice
- Supplementary books on science
- Cross-curriculum lessons (math + electricity)
- Video instruction

Below is a list of the case study summaries on one of the Study Group websites. It illustrates the range of topics covered in the cases.

  **Case Study Summaries**  
Hi, here is where you can post your summary of your case study, which will serve as a resource to you and a treasure trove for the other students in the class also.  
<http://www.communityzero.com/ideal102c?go=zc1924460>

- [Summary - GEDC Writing Skills: Essay and Grammar](#)
- [Summary- When Incorrect Grammar "Sound Right" >](#)
- [Summary - Video Math Instruction](#)
- [Summary - Math Learning Difficulty >](#)
- [Summary - Teaching Beginning Fractions Online >](#)
- [Summary - Teaching Commonly Confused Words >](#)
- [Summary - How to Efficiently Handle Workbook/Mail Instruction >](#)
- [Summary - Building Rapport with a Socially Withdrawn Learner >](#)
- [Summary - Teaching Science Concepts \(electricity\) at a Distance](#)
- [Summary - Teaching Ratios Online](#)  
Resources and strategies for teaching ratios online.

### Length of a Study Group

Participants were asked about the length of a Study Group. Almost everyone (88%) said that the four weeks they experienced was *about right*; while a small number (12%) felt it was too short (y24). There was less agreement on how to use those four weeks. About half felt that two case studies per week worked well. Another quarter voted to keep the same number of weeks, but discuss the cases selectively so that only one case would be discussed in any one week. The remainder voted to increase the number of participants and divide the group in two so that each group had to discuss only one case per week, but could read the comments and summaries of the other group (y25).

### Perceived Value of Study Groups

How did the participants evaluate their Study Group experience? Two questions on the survey asked participants how valuable the Study Group was for “deepening your understanding of how to teach GED Connection at a distance” and “deepening your understanding of adult learning problems in general.” The results are shown in the table below. The modal response was *pretty valuable* (41%) with another 25% rating it *very valuable*. One-third rated it only *somewhat valuable*.

1. Overall, how valuable would you say this Study Group has been in terms of deepening your understanding of how to teach GED Connection at a distance?			
		Response Percent	Response Total
Not at all valuable		0%	0
Somewhat valuable		35.3%	6
<b>Pretty valuable</b>		<b>41.2%</b>	<b>7</b>
Very valuable		23.5%	4
<b>Total Respondents</b>			<b>17</b>
(skipped this question)			0

2. Overall, how valuable would you say this Study Group has been in terms of deepening your understanding of adult learning problems in general?			
		Response Percent	Response Total
Not at all valuable		5.9%	1
A little valuable		29.4%	5
<b>Pretty valuable</b>		<b>41.2%</b>	<b>7</b>
Very valuable		23.5%	4
<b>Total Respondents</b>			<b>17</b>
(skipped this question)			0

In a later question participants were asked: “If there was a professional development requirement for adult education teachers in your state, should study groups qualify as meeting that requirement?” All but one teacher said *yes*.

### **What They Learned**

Participants were asked about six possible outcomes they might have derived from the experience. Their responses are shown below (y4). The modal response was *a little bit* for four of the items: “understand better why learners have problems with particular parts of GED Connection,” “with particular GED concepts,” “have a greater familiarity with GED Connection materials,” and “have a better understanding of the online teaching process.” The highest rating was given to “have more solutions for learner problems” and “have more teaching resources available to you as an online teacher.” Virtually every teacher said they got a number of useful suggestions for addressing their personal case study problem (y3).

4. As a result of the Study Group do you...				
	Not at All	A little Bit	Quite a Bit	Response Total
Understand better why learners have problems with particular parts of GED Connection?	6% (1)	<b>50% (8)</b>	44% (7)	<b>16</b>
Understand better why learners have problems with particular GED concepts?	6% (1)	<b>69% (11)</b>	25% (4)	<b>16</b>
Have more solutions for learner problems?	0% (0)	35% (6)	<b>65% (11)</b>	<b>17</b>
Have more teaching resources available to you as an online teacher?	0% (0)	12% (2)	<b>88% (15)</b>	<b>17</b>
Have a better understanding of the online teaching process?	0% (0)	<b>69% (11)</b>	31% (5)	<b>16</b>
Have a greater familiarity with the GED Connection materials?	6% (1)	<b>62% (10)</b>	31% (5)	<b>16</b>
<b>Total Respondents</b>				<b>17</b>

An open-ended questions asked for a few examples of “teaching ‘tips’ picked up in the discussions or read about in Contributions” (y5). Of the 17 participants only four could think of none. Eleven mentioned the web resources they could use with their students. Two mentioned particular strategies such as ways to improve retention or the idea: “have students use instant messenger to write in a non-threatening way—the student can make up jokes or riddles using homonyms.” Another question asked specifically about the resource question: “In the course of the Study Group you and your colleagues identified a number of resources—web sites, workbooks, references. How useful will these be for your work (y11)? Eighty-two percent said *very useful*.

Is there any evidence that a Study Group experience had a deeper impact for some participants than adding their repertoire of teaching tips? Question six on the post survey asked, “Can you think of an example where a comment (or collection of comments) in the discussion of a case caused you to re-think how you approach a learning or teaching

issue? If yes describe your 'new thinking.' If no, type 'no.'" Seven (40%) answered "no" or mentioned a very low level of change. Another seven described what might be characterized as a mid-level of change. Three described a very deep change.

*Examples of moderate change*

3. I particularly liked the idea of identifying obstacles to student goals and discussing them with the student so that there are strategies in place to overcome them.
5. Rather than trying to correspond totally via written exchange on a higher-level math problem that a student has difficulty understanding, use the phone to help walk them through and suggest specific problems to work on other online web sites.
6. Ways of approaching a student who doesn't speak in standard English. I don't remember the specifics right off the bat.
8. Yes: Don't try to force an activity if it doesn't make sense to do it at a distance. Like teaching math or the science discussion of electricity. Find another way for the learner to practice these skills
9. A case study spoke of the lack of confidence a learner experienced. I realized adult learners will experience the same challenges working online as in the classroom.
14. I was surprised that at least one teacher stated that she doesn't waste much time teaching fractions because there are only 2 problems on the GED. That hasn't been my experience, and I think it's our responsibility to prepare students for the GED and beyond. Life is full of fractions. You can't just skip them because you don't feel comfortable teaching them.
15. The discussion on "what is distance". I have suspected the students needed to be about ready to take their GED to be successful studying at a distance. This is the first time I heard someone else "voice" this idea.
17. Yes, in math I need to stress practice for those who forget procedures quickly.

*Examples of deep change*

4. Yes, I have re-thought the teaching of the writing process as a result of discussion. I now feel as though a series of specific and guided steps can achieve better success in writing issues rather than the previous "diving in to writing the essay cold turkey."
12. I was flexible about having my students write in complete sentences when they answered. I was just happy to get some type of answer from them in the beginning. Now I am more strict about writing in complete sentences when answering the questions.
13. Someone posed a question or comment regarding teaching low level learners online. I feel that everyone deserves a chance, but one individual gave a very concise answer, and I quote... "Sorry, but I feel you are being setup for failure. In my opinion & experience, students with scores that low have no business

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being in the online program. End of story." This made me rethink my theory in that perhaps putting an AFL student in that situation not only sets the program up for a failure, but also sets the student up for frustration and failure.

It seems clear that almost everyone derived a collection of tips for teaching. For some the experience provided an opportunity to look more deeply at their teaching and consider alternative strategies in one or two areas.

### Confidence

Another type of impact is in the area of confidence in teaching GED Connection. The answers to the survey question (y9) indicate that confidence in teaching “the course in general” increase *quite a bit*, but that the impact varied by component: *not at all* for teaching about the video, *a little bit* for teaching the workbook, and *quite a bit* for teaching the online portion.

9. As a result of the Study Group are you more confident in your ability to teach GED Connection at a distance?				
	Not at all	A Little Bit	Quite a Bit	Response Average
The course in general	6% (1)	<b>59% (10)</b>	35% (6)	<b>2.29</b>
The online portion	12% (2)	41% (7)	<b>47% (8)</b>	<b>2.35</b>
The workbook	6% (1)	<b>76% (13)</b>	18% (3)	<b>2.12</b>
The video	<b>47% (8)</b>	35% (6)	18% (3)	<b>1.71</b>
<b>Total Respondents</b>				<b>17</b>

### Community of Practice

One goal of the Study Group is to build a community of practice among the participants. Such a community could be seen as a resource to help one another after the Study Group itself is completed. In the question below it is clear that “other teachers where I work” continues to be the most likely person they would turn to. But they report they are *somewhat* or *very* likely to ask “teachers in this Study Group.”

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7. In the future, if you had a problem teaching a particular GED concept (or GED Connection lesson) at a distance, how likely is it that you would ask any of these people for help?						
	Not at all likely	Somewhat unlikely	Somewhat likely	Very likely	N/A	Response Average
Other teachers where I work	0% (0)	18% (3)	24% (4)	<b>59% (10)</b>	0% (0)	<b>3.41</b>
Teachers in this Study Group	6% (1)	6% (1)	<b>53% (9)</b>	35% (6)	0% (0)	<b>3.18</b>
Someone else	24% (4)	0% (0)	<b>41% (7)</b>	18% (3)	18% (3)	<b>2.64</b>
<b>Total Respondents</b>						<b>17</b>

“Someone else” (10): administrator (3), other teachers not where I work (2), education professor (2), professional in subject area (1), “I constantly bug everyone if I need an answer. I bug KET a lot.

### **Conclusion**

The data indicates that the Study Group model works quite efficiently. For 18 hours of study invested at a time and place that meets the needs of participants, the outcomes appear to be quite good. Teachers acquire a large repertoire of teaching tips and have an opportunity to examine their teaching practices in a supportive environment. The model worked well for those who teach GED Connection. The model now needs to be applied to other curricula in use in member states: Crossroads Café, Plato, Skills Tutor, and Workplace Essential Skills.

In this coming year the Project IDEAL Support Center will encourage member states to offer Study Groups in their state. The Support Center will provide the necessary materials and custom website, along with training and ongoing support for new facilitators.

## **Appendix: Survey Results**

### **Baseline Survey**

In the following tables the survey question number is noted in parentheses after the question. An “x” denotes the question came from the baseline survey. Results are reported for the combined McCoy and Plantz Study Groups.

#### Characteristics of Participants: General

	<b>N</b>	<b>Pct</b>
Residence		
OH	7	41
PA	10	59
Years Teaching Adult Learners (x1)		
0-2	5	26
3-5	5	26
>5	9	47
Years Preparing Adults for the GED (x2)		
0-2	6	32
3-5	5	26
>5	8	47
Years teaching GED Connection (x3)		
First Year	4	21
Second Year	13	68
Third Year	11	11

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**Study Group Specific Characteristics**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Pct</b>
Participated in a Study Group Before (x15)		
No	10	53
Once	5	26
More Than Once	4	21
Easy Access to the Internet at convenient times (x17)		
No	1	5
Yes	18	95
Comfort with computer activities: I need practice with... (x18)		
a. Accessing the Study Group website	4	21
b. Participating in an online discussion	8	42
c. Uploading & downloading files	2	11
d. Copy my case to the Contribution section [of the website]	6	32

*A Report on the Pilot Test of D102: Study Groups*

Does a Teacher Need Support to Teach GED Connection?

	<b>N</b>	<b>Pct</b>
Overall, how easy or difficult is GED Connection to teach? (x7)		
a. Quite difficult	3	17
b. Challenging in a few areas	14	78
c. Quite easy	1	5
How often do you encounter a student having a learning problem for which you don't have a solution? (x10)		
a. Almost never	5	28
b. Occasionally	12	67
c. Quite often	1	5
How easy or difficult is it to provide one-on-one instruction around topics with which a student has difficulty? (x9e)		
a. Not a problem	2	11
b. Somewhat challenging	14	74
c. Very challenging	3	16

Community of Support for Teaching

	<b>N</b>	<b>Pct</b>
How often do you talk with colleagues about distance teaching situations or problems? (x11)		
a. Almost never	3	16
b. Occasionally	7	37
c. Quite often	9	47

## **Follow-Up Survey**

Results of the Follow-Up Survey appear on the following pages.

## Results Summary

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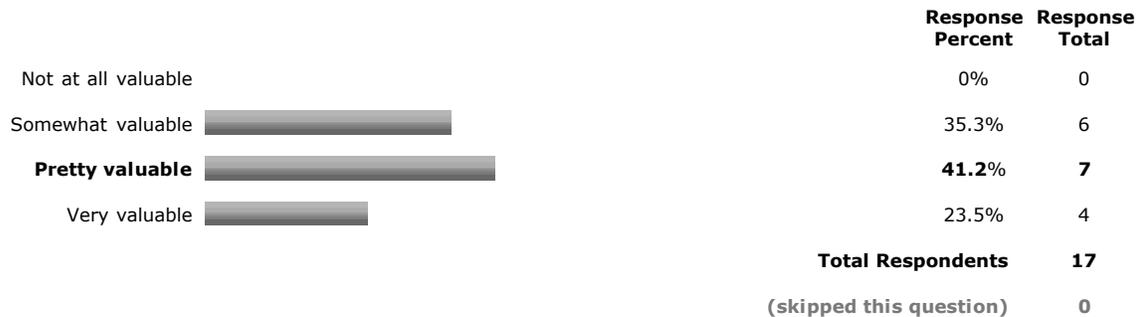
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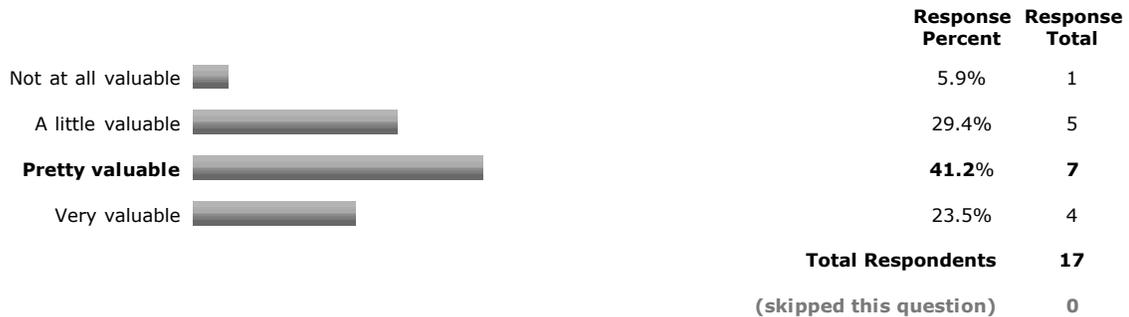
**Reports:** Summary and Detail

## 2. Value of Study Groups

1. Overall, how valuable would you say this Study Group has been in terms of deepening your understanding of how to teach GED Connection at a distance?



2. Overall, how valuable would you say this Study Group has been in terms of deepening your understanding of adult learning problems in general?



3. Did the electronic discussions provide you with useful suggestions for addressing your case study problem?



4. As a result of the Study Group do you...

	Not at All	A little Bit	Quite a Bit	Response Total
Understand better why learners have problems with particular parts of GED Connection?	6% (1)	<b>50% (8)</b>	44% (7)	<b>16</b>
Understand better why learners have problems with particular GED concepts?	6% (1)	<b>69% (11)</b>	25% (4)	<b>16</b>
Have more solutions for learner problems?	0% (0)	35% (6)	<b>65% (11)</b>	<b>17</b>
Have more teaching resources available to you as an online teacher?	0% (0)	12% (2)	<b>88% (15)</b>	<b>17</b>
Have a better understanding of the online teaching process?	0% (0)	<b>69% (11)</b>	31% (5)	<b>16</b>
Have a greater familiarity with the GED Connection materials?	6% (1)	<b>62% (10)</b>	31% (5)	<b>16</b>
		<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>17</b>	
		(skipped this question)		<b>0</b>

5. Can you provide a few examples of teaching "tips" you picked up in the discussions or read about in Contributions? If you can't think of any, type "none."

[View](#) **Total Respondents** **17**  
(skipped this question) **0**

6. Can you think of an example where a comment (or collection of comments) in the discussion of a case caused you to re-think how you approach a learning or teaching issue? If yes, describe your "new thinking." If no, type "no."

[View](#) **Total Respondents** **17**  
(skipped this question) **0**

7. In the future, if you had a problem teaching a particular GED concept (or GED Connection lesson) at a distance, how likely is it that you would ask any of these people for help?

	Not at all likely	Somewhat unlikely	Somewhat likely	Very likely	N/A	Response Average
Other teachers where I work	0% (0)	18% (3)	24% (4)	<b>59% (10)</b>	0% (0)	<b>3.41</b>
Teachers in this Study Group	6% (1)	6% (1)	<b>53% (9)</b>	35% (6)	0% (0)	<b>3.18</b>
Someone else	24% (4)	0% (0)	<b>41% (7)</b>	18% (3)	18% (3)	<b>2.64</b>
			<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>17</b>		
			(skipped this question)			<b>0</b>

8. If you indicated someone else, what role does that person have--e.g., friend, administrator, education professor.

[View](#) **Total Respondents** **11**  
(skipped this question) **6**

9. As a result of the Study Group are you more confident in your ability to teach GED Connection at a distance?

	Not at all	A Little Bit	Quite a Bit	Response Average
The course in general	6% (1)	<b>59% (10)</b>	35% (6)	<b>2.29</b>
The online portion	12% (2)	41% (7)	<b>47% (8)</b>	<b>2.35</b>

The workbook	6% (1)	<b>76% (13)</b>	18% (3)	<b>2.12</b>
The video	<b>47% (8)</b>	35% (6)	18% (3)	<b>1.71</b>
			<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>17</b>
			(skipped this question)	0

10. If there was a professional development requirement for adult education teachers in your state, should study groups qualify as meeting that requirement?

	Response Percent	Response Total
No 	5.9%	1
<b>Yes</b> 	<b>94.1%</b>	<b>16</b>
	<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>17</b>
	(skipped this question)	0

11. In the course of the Study Group you and your colleagues identified a number of resources—web sites, workbooks, references. How useful will these be for your work?

	Response Percent	Response Total
Not at all useful	0%	0
A little useful 	17.6%	3
<b>Very useful</b> 	<b>82.4%</b>	<b>14</b>
	<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>17</b>
	(skipped this question)	0

### 3. Study Group Mechanics

12. How useful was the conference call that began this Study Group?

	Response Percent	Response Total
Not At All Useful	0%	0
A Little Useful 	47.1%	8
<b>Very Useful</b> 	<b>52.9%</b>	<b>9</b>
	<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>17</b>
	(skipped this question)	0

13. Why?

<a href="#">View</a> <b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>17</b>
(skipped this question)	0

14. After the initial conference call, all "discussions" were electronic, using "typed text." Was the electronic discussion tool adequate to engage the important ideas in the case studies?

	Response Percent	Response Total
It was <b>inadequate</b> ; I found it difficult to deal with everything as text exchanges	0%	0
Typing and reading the comments of others was <b>a little challenging</b> , but it worked to make for a useful exchange 	18.8%	3

<b>It was adequate</b>		<b>81.2%</b>	<b>13</b>
		<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>16</b>
		(skipped this question)	1

15. To be a true "discussion" many people need to contribute their ideas. In the course of one week, how often should a participant expect to log on and contribute to make the discussion valuable?

		<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Once		5.9%	1
<b>Twice</b>		<b>58.8%</b>	<b>10</b>
Three or more times		35.3%	6
		<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>17</b>
		(skipped this question)	0

16. Some people are very comfortable typing their thoughts; others find this to be an awkward way to communicate. How comfortable are you with typing as a way to communicate your ideas?

		<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Very Uncomfortable		0%	0
Somewhat Uncomfortable		0%	0
Somewhat Comfortable		37.5%	6
<b>Very Comfortable</b>		<b>62.5%</b>	<b>10</b>
		<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>16</b>
		(skipped this question)	1

17. If you enrolled in another Study Group, would your preference be to meet by telephone at a preset time each week or use an electronic discussion where you could check in and discuss topics at your convenience? I would prefer...

		<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
A weekly telephone call		0%	0
<b>An electronic discussion</b>		<b>100%</b>	<b>17</b>
		<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>17</b>
		(skipped this question)	0

18. Why do you feel this way?

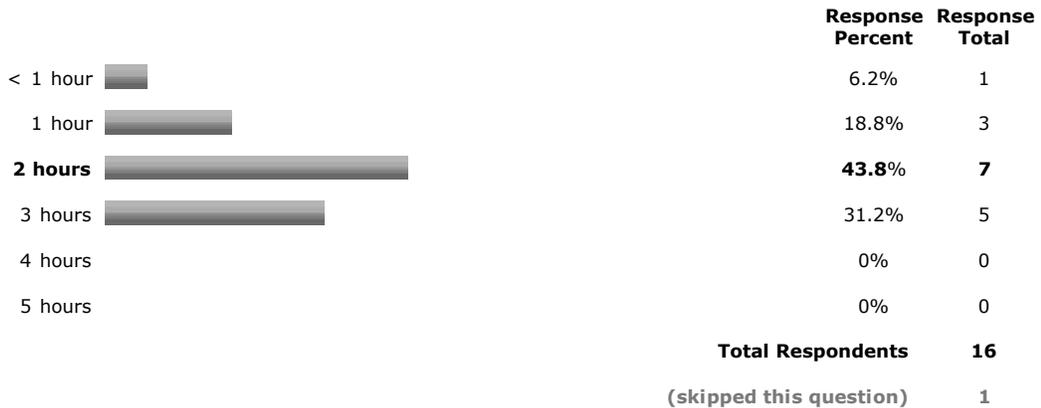
<a href="#">View</a>	<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>17</b>
		(skipped this question)

19. How often did you log in to the Study Group website in a typical week?

		<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Once		11.8%	2
Twice		11.8%	2
<b>Three times</b>		<b>58.8%</b>	<b>10</b>
More often		17.6%	3

**Total Respondents 17**  
 (skipped this question) 0

20. About how much time did you spend each week on activities related to this Study Group? This includes the actual time your were "online," but also time spent preparing to contribute.



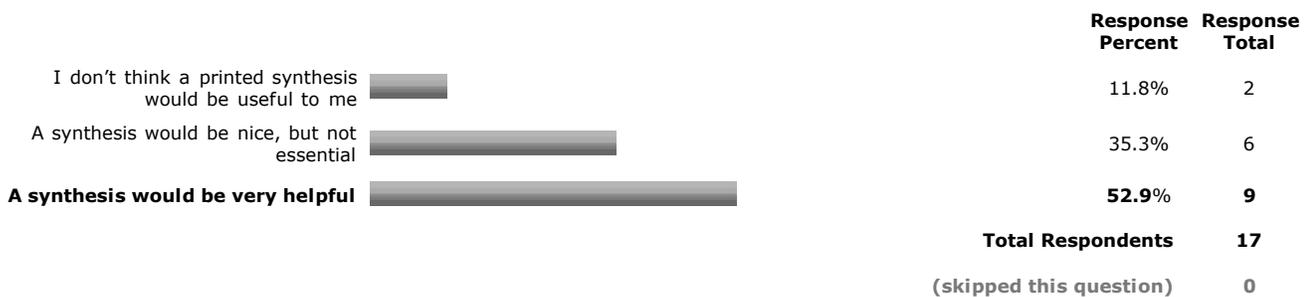
21. What is a reasonable amount of time for a teacher like yourself to spend each week in an activity like a Study Group?



22. Were there any technical aspects of the Study Group (adding your case study, making a Contribution, posting a reply to a discussion, etc.) that were confusing or difficult for you?

[View](#) **Total Respondents 17**  
 (skipped this question) 0

23. By participating in the discussions do you feel you have already learned what is useful, or would you like a printed synthesis to refer to at another time?



24. In its current design a Study Group lasts four weeks. Would you say this is

**Response Percent** **Response Total**

Too short		11.8%	2
<b>About right</b>		<b>88.2%</b>	<b>15</b>
Too long		0%	0
<b>Total Respondents</b>			<b>17</b>
(skipped this question)			0

25. To discuss everyone's case study in the time allotted we scheduled two case studies per week. Some people felt it was difficult to comment on two different case studies in one week. What would you recommend?

		<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
<b>Keep the current format and discuss two case studies per week</b>		<b>47.1%</b>	<b>8</b>
Same length of time (4 weeks), but choose only a few cases to discuss so that only one case is discussed per week		23.5%	4
Lengthen the Study Group by a few weeks to permit discussing all of the cases, one each week		5.9%	1
Add more participants and divide the "class." A person would only be allowed to comment in one "class," but they could read the comments in both.		23.5%	4
<b>Total Respondents</b>			<b>17</b>
(skipped this question)			0

26. Do you have any other ideas about format?

<a href="#">View</a> <b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>11</b>
(skipped this question)	6

27. What suggestions do you have for facilitating the Study Group?

<a href="#">View</a> <b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>13</b>
(skipped this question)	4

#### 4. The Future

28. Next semester, would you like to keep connected in some way with your Study Group team in a less formal way? For example, we could keep the Study Group website open for members to post a teaching-learning problem if one arose, or for you to find or post some additional resources.

		<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Not interested		6.2%	1
<b>Interested a little</b>		<b>50%</b>	<b>8</b>
Very Interested		43.8%	7
<b>Total Respondents</b>			<b>16</b>
(skipped this question)			1

29. We are thinking about inviting the teachers from this Study Group to "sit in" on a future Study Group, but with no obligation—just the opportunity to add comments if you were so inclined. Would you be interested in doing this?

	Response Percent	Response Total
No; I don't have the time or interest	5.9%	1
<b>Yes; I would try to occasionally</b>	<b>64.7%</b>	<b>11</b>
Yes; I would try as often as I could	29.4%	5
<b>Total Respondents</b>		<b>17</b>
(skipped this question)		0

30. Would you be interested in becoming a paid facilitator for a future Study Group on GEDC?

	Response Percent	Response Total
No	47.1%	8
<b>Yes</b>	<b>52.9%</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Total Respondents</b>		<b>17</b>
(skipped this question)		0

31. Do you have any other ideas that would be useful as we plan for the next Study Group?

<a href="#">View</a> Total Respondents	9
(skipped this question)	8

32. What Study Group were you in?

	Response Percent	Response Total
DL102A (Nov-Dec 2003)	0%	0
<b>DL102B (Spring, 2004)</b>	<b>64.7%</b>	<b>11</b>
DL102C (Spring, 2004)	35.3%	6
<b>Total Respondents</b>		<b>17</b>
(skipped this question)		0

33. In what state do you teach?

	Response Percent	Response Total
Ohio	41.2%	7
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	<b>58.8%</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Total Respondents</b>		<b>17</b>
(skipped this question)		0

34. To describe Study Groups to other interested teachers we like to include samples of the type of exchanges that take place in the Discussions. Occasionally your CommunityZero user name might appear next to an entry written by you. Please indicate if you give us permission to keep your user name next to an entry made by you.

	Response Percent	Response Total
<b>Yes, if you use a discussion excerpt of mine you can leave in my user name</b>	<b>88.2%</b>	<b>15</b>
No, If you use a discussion excerpt of mine please remove my user name	11.8%	2

excerpt containing my words.

0% 0

**Total Respondents 17**

(skipped this question) 0

35. If you answered no to the previous question, please provide your username here.

**Total Respondents 3**

(skipped this question) 14

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Can you provide a few examples of teaching "tips" you picked up in the discussions or read about in Contributions? If you can't think of any, type "none."

1. None
2. none Note #4 above - on the ones I didn't answer participating in the study group did not impact me in any way. I had an O.K. understanding of the online process, ged connection materials, & why learners have problems prior to the study group.
3. Check Community Resources more often -- good tips there.
4. m&m math
5. Strategies for improving retention. A variety of programs and internet sites that could be helpful for students needing to be more interactive.
6. Have students use instant messenger to write in a non-threatening way The student can make up jokes or riddles using homonyms
7. I learned about some interesting wed sites. These web sites were very good and are useful to my students.
8. good websites, etc.
9. references to websites. assignment packets. additional book work.
10. various web-sites particularly in math old resources are possibly some of the best teaching writing strategies teaching complicated concepts on-ling various hand outs
11. none
12. I liked the idea of using a scanner to provide extra material without using snail mail.
13. I found the most valuable teaching tips were the links that other teachers provided.
14. Great URLs and texts. Also, a number of teaching strategies discussed were helpful.
15. The extra on line resources are great. I have better understanding of the qualifications a student needs to study at a distance.
16. Web resources to meet specific needs, distributing workbook materials one chapter at a time to help retain learners.
17. Using file cards for students to write math procededures to help them practice the procededure until it becomes ingrained. I also got many useful web site addresses.

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Can you think of an example where a comment (or collection of comments) in the discussion of a case caused you to re-think how you approach a learning or teaching issue? If yes, describe your "new thinking." If no, type "no."

1. Puzzles
2. no
3. I particularly liked the idea of identifying obstacles to student goals and discussing them with the student so that there are strategies in place to overcome them.
4. Yes, I have re-thought the teaching of the writing process as a result of discussion. I now feel as though a series of specific and guided steps can achieve better success in writing issues rather than the previous "diving in to writing the essay cold turkey."
5. Rather than trying to correspond totally via written exchange on a higher-level math problem that a student has difficulty understanding, use the phone to help walk them through and suggest specific problems to work on other online web sites.
6. Ways of approaching a student who doesn't speak in standard English. I don't remember the specifics right off the bat.
7. no
8. yes: Don't try to force an activity if it doesn't make sense to do it at a distance. Like teaching math or the science discussion of electricity. Find another way for the learner to practice these skills
9. A case study spoke of the lack of confidence a learner experienced. I realized adult learners will experience the same challenges working online as in the classroom.
10. ESL material to individuals who use improper grammar
11. no
12. I was flexible about having my students write in complete sentences when they answered. I was just happy to get some type of answer from them in the beginning. Now I am more strict about writing in complete sentences when answering the questions.
13. Someone posed a question or comment regarding teaching low level learners online. I feel that everyone deserves a chance, but one individual gave a very concise answer, and I quote... "Sorry, but I feel you are being setup for failure. In my opinion & experience, students with scores that low have no business being in the online program. End of story." This made me rethink my theory in that perhaps putting an AFL student in that situation not only sets the program up for a failure, but also sets the student up for frustration and failure.
14. I was surprised that at least one teacher stated that she doesn't waste much time teaching fractions because there are only 2 problems on the GED. That hasn't been my experience, and I think it's our responsibility to prepare students for the GED and beyond. Life is full of fractions. You can't just skip them because you don't feel comfortable teaching them.
15. The discussion on "what is distance". I have suspected the students needed to be about ready to take their GED to be successful studying at a distance. This is the first time I heard someone else "voice" this idea.
16. No.
17. Yes, in math I need to stress practice for those who forget procedures quickly.

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If you indicated someone else, what role does that person have--e.g., friend, administrator, education professor.

1. Teachers in the Field -- not where I work
2. administrator
3. administrator
4. instructor
5. friend of spouse
6. education professor
7. other adult ed staff in my region who focus on GED
8. I constantly bug everyone if I need an answer. I bug KET alot.
9. administrator
10. administrator/education professor
11. professional in subject area

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### Why?

1. Ideas from other instructors
2. shared ideas
3. I was out of town.
4. ...set the stage...
5. Helped me get my mind on track to what was to follow. Set the stage for the entire effort. Helped me further understand the ground rules.
6. It laid out some ways to approach the case studies and got us acquainted with the other teachers.
7. The conference call gave us a chance to discuss real problems with real teachers. The social interactions between people of the same profession is very important. There should have been more.
8. Set the ground rules and expectations
9. It was detailed and informative. It guided us through a sample case study. It provided us with additional instructions to begin the study group.
10. Directions were made clearer at this point.
11. I believe the intent was for the participants to get to know each other and practice a discussion, but I am not sure that the call accomplished both purposes.
12. I would think it is the same reasons our students need to hear a voice. Sometimes you feel all alone when you are teaching GED on-line. It's nice to hear and see others for some interaction.
13. It's always nice to be able to put at least a voice with a message. It made the online study group experience a little more personable.
14. It set clear expectations for the course.
15. It help to make the class more relaxed. Talking to classmates made them more real.
16. By having a phone conversation with my peers in the study group, we were able to break the ice. It was easier to take risks -- present a case study, offer suggestions on other cases -- after getting a sense of the other participants' personalities and perspectives.
17. I felt that I personally knew the participants.

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Why do you feel this way?

1. It is easier to schedule this time. A real-time chat could be another way to participate.
2. can do it at my convenience
3. Too difficult to get everyone together for a set time telephone call.
4. convenience of time/reduction of scheduling conflict
5. My schedule is quite varied from day to day, week to week. I prefer the flexibility the electronic discussion affords. It also helps minimize time spent travelling (on the road, for instance) or between buildings.
6. It is easier to fit in my schedule and it gives you flexibility to research the case studies.
7. Sometimes you are not available for the conference call.
8. Too hard to get everyone together in real time
9. Electronic discussion allows for more time flexibility and time flexibility is essential for me. Also, I am able to communicate more accurately if I am typing / writing rather than verbalizing on the spot.
10. The electronic discussion gives me more time to research wanted materials.
11. My time is pretty tight. I doubt I would have time to meet for a call. It was challenging enough to log in regularly.
12. I am not enrolled in a another study group at this time, but if I was I would like to be able to log in at my own convenience.
13. It's much more convenient.
14. The written record of the discussion and resources is more valuable.
15. Setting a preset time is very difficult for me in my life right now. Distance education for me means asynchronous communication.
16. My schedule makes it difficult to set aside a time to meet with others via telephone. Electronic discussion allows me to make use of free time in between my other obligations without needing to bend to the scheduling needs of the other participants.
17. It is now 6:58 AM. I am on the computer at all hours. I am not in my office for conference calls at a time convenient for me. I can make the time, of course. For extra projects such as this, I mostly work from home.

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Were there any technical aspects of the Study Group (adding your case study, making a Contribution, posting a reply to a discussion, etc.) that were confusing or difficult for you?

1. Figuring out the link to the study group. Kim did not link it correctly in the email communication.
2. no
3. No. I am familiar with the Community Zero site and how to navigate the different parts.
4. no
5. none
6. No
7. No
8. Community Zero website is a ;itt;e hard to navigate. Sometimes it's not very intuitive. Still, it's a good resource for this kind of activity. Don't know of any better ones out there.
9. Just navigating through the website. However, I eventually found where items needed to be.
10. no
11. I don't think the site is that user friendly, but the more I work with it, the easier it becomes.
12. No, I think I got it.
13. No.
14. none
15. Adding resources, I wasn't sure where or how to do this.
16. no.
17. Yes, there were several places to respond to the activity. One time I picked the wrong one.

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