

Implementing a System of Quality Assurance Checks in a Large-Scale Online Professional Development Course

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Purpose

- 1) To share an integral part of the process of assuring the quality of an organization's outcomes: **Quality Assurance Checks (QACs)—a situated model**; and
- 2) To provide recent findings related to the ongoing investigation regarding the impact of implementing QACs in a large-scale statewide online professional development project.

Significance & Rationale

- Some of Florida's professional development efforts, that now being undertaken, are SO LARGE, that the more traditional face-to-face format may no longer be the best option. Because of its flexibility, interest continues to grow in the use of the Internet to provide training.
- Online delivery of certification programs and other forms of professional development benefit both pre- and in-service teachers, schools, and the higher education institutions that offer them.

Significance & Rationale, contd.

- Effective evaluation strategies for these online programs is crucial.
- This need may translate to other e-learning situations. For example, K-12 online learning is a new field growing at an estimated annual pace of 25% (Patrick & Thompson, 2006).

Background

- FOR-PD was launched in January 2003 and is housed at the University of Central Florida.
- The project is funded by the Florida DOE *Just Read, Florida!* Initiative.
- The free 14-week online course is facilitated by reading specialists and other well-qualified educators.
- The course is offered in WebCT format.
- FOR-PD was developed collaboratively with
 - literacy and technology experts,
 - school districts,
 - professional organizations, and
 - teacher educators across the state of Florida.



Florida's Plan for Developing & Supporting Teacher Expertise in Reading

Florida Add-on Reading Endorsement

Competency 1: Foundations in Language and Cognition

Competency 2: **Foundations of Research-Based Practices**

Competency 3: Foundations of Assessment

Competency 4: Foundations of Differentiation

Competency 5: Application of Differentiated Instruction

Competency 6: Demonstration of Accomplishment (Practicum)



Large Scale

- The project is a highly-collaborative endeavor. Currently FOR-PD works with **sixty-seven** Florida districts, **seven** universities, and recently the project has been extended through **five** Community College Educator Preparation Institutes (EPIs).

Large Scale

*Over the past four years, FOR-PD has served over **25,000** participants statewide.*

*Spring 2007:
2,200 participants in
120 sections (currently open)*

Defining the Role of Quality Assurance Checks (QACs)

Quality Assurance as a Process

- Quality is defined as “**conformance to requirements**” not goodness (Crosby, 1979).
- QACs help to **create a culture of change** and allow the project to exist in a **continuous loop of improvement**.
 - **Requirements are regularly reviewed** and do change.
Thinking, Planning, Implementing, Analyzing
 - **Frequent updates** to course content and ongoing improvements to navigation.
 - The focus of QACs change according to needs.
 - **Prevention** is key (eliminating problems before they happen).
- QACs align with the project goals and help **ensure the quality of outcomes**.
 - Assure participants needs are met so they can be satisfied and successful.

QAC Example

QACs provide the following:

- Increased and enhanced communications between FOR-PD and facilitators and between FOR-PD and participants.
- Tailored evaluations with regard to student and facilitator progress.
- Gentle reminders when certain benchmarks should occur.

The first check begins during weeks 2 or 3 of the course. Two others follow with the last one in week 9 or 10 of the 14-week course.

- completion rates/evaluation of student performance
- survey results
- interview results
- focus groups

PLAN

- facilitator PD
- navigation/content revisions
- new items for instruments

REFLECT

QAC PROCESS

IMPLEMENT

REVIEW

- # lagging
- # dropped
- communications (facilitator to participant(s))
- focus groups/interviews/surveys

- new policies/procedures
- refined content/framework
- refined facilitation

QAC Example

QAC #1 (performed in week 2 or 3):

- Check that facilitator posted welcome message.
 - More specifically does it contain:
 - contact information, when grading will occur, how feedback will be given, specific facilitator expectations i.e. grammar and conventions)?
 - It should be located in the facilitator announcement area.
- Facilitators are provided data related to participants' progress and asked to respond to the following questions.
 1. What have you done to encourage these participants (ones who are behind or haven't started)?
 2. Are there any participants you would like FOR-PD to contact? ...

QAC Example

QAC #2 (performed within weeks 4 to 6):

- Check that facilitators are actively participating in discussions (well defined)
- Are they posting grades on a regular basis (about one lesson per week)?

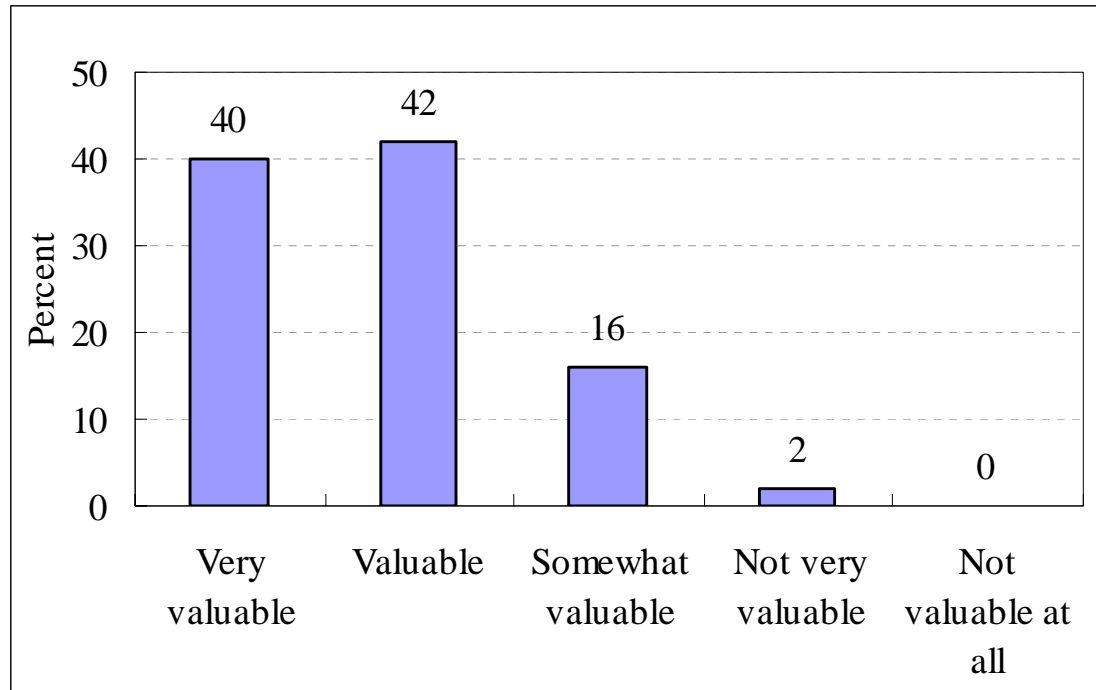
QAC #3 (performed within weeks 9 and 10):

- Same as QAC # 2 but in addition to that facilitators are again provided data related to their participants' progress and asked to respond to two questions (see QAC #1).

Results of Analysis

Results from QAC Survey

Overall Value of QACs



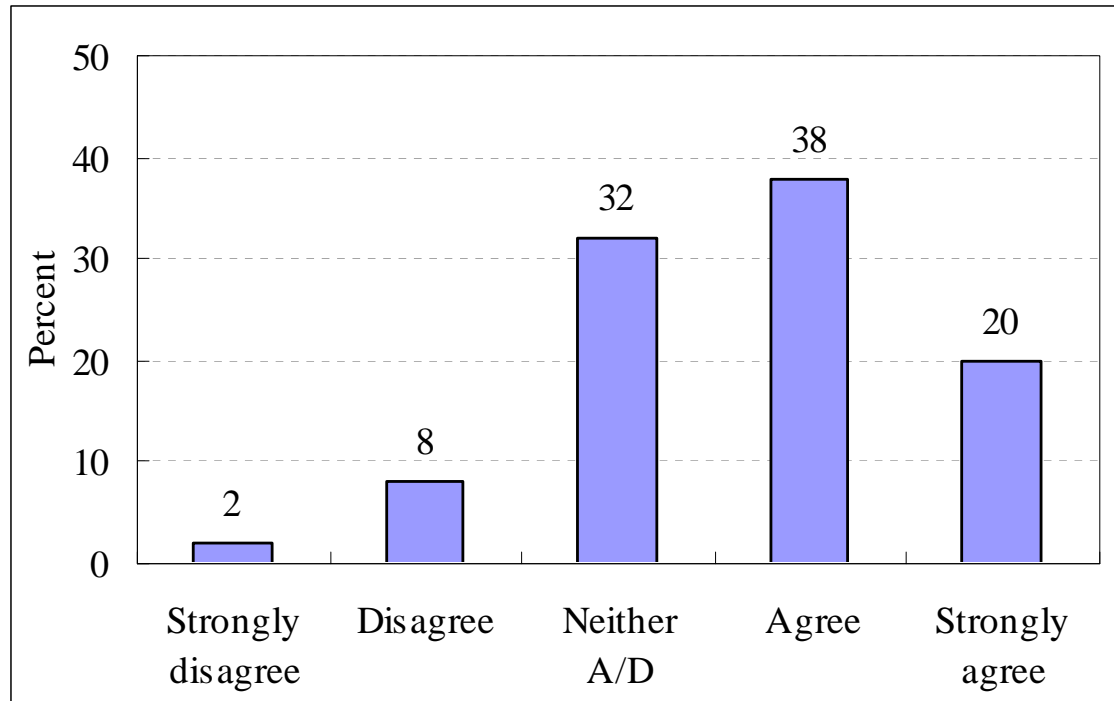
Facilitator Rating of the Overall Value of Quality Assurance Checks

Note. Data were obtained from Phase IV QAC Facilitator Survey where 51% of spring 2006 facilitators responded.

(n = 60).

Results from QAC Survey

Enhancing Facilitator Understanding

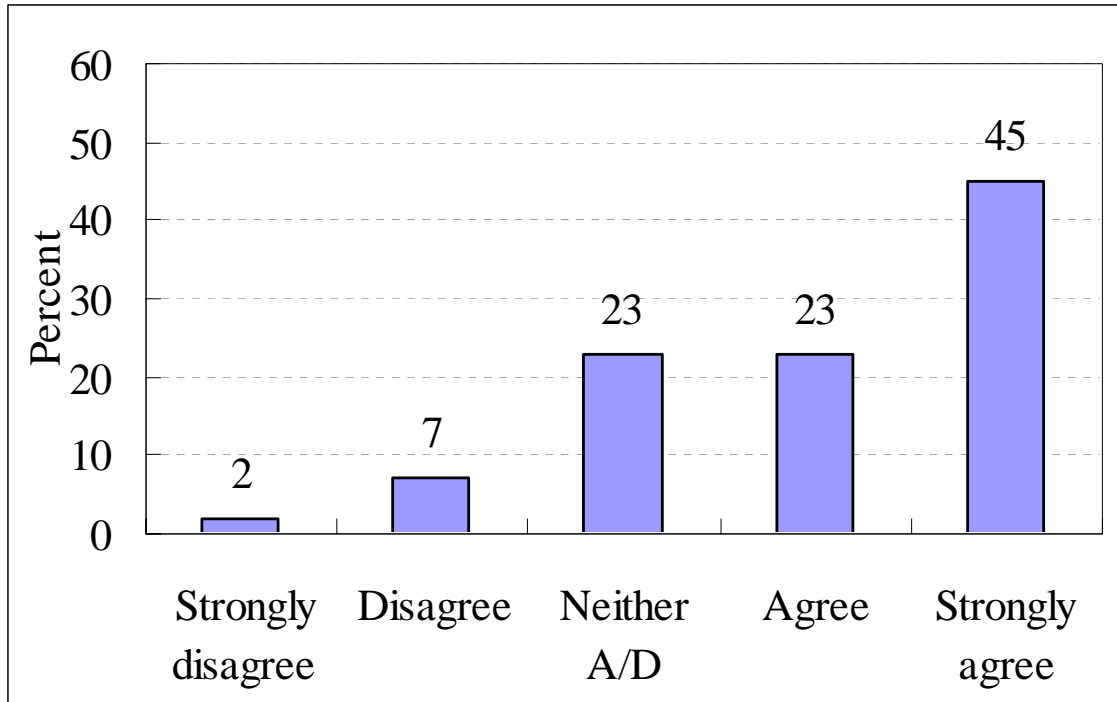


Regarding a Specific Course Section: Facilitator Rating of How Reports Helped Them to Better Understand Participants' Needs

*Note. Data were obtained from Phase IV QAC Facilitator Survey where 51% of spring 2006 facilitators responded.
(n = 60).*

Results from QAC Survey

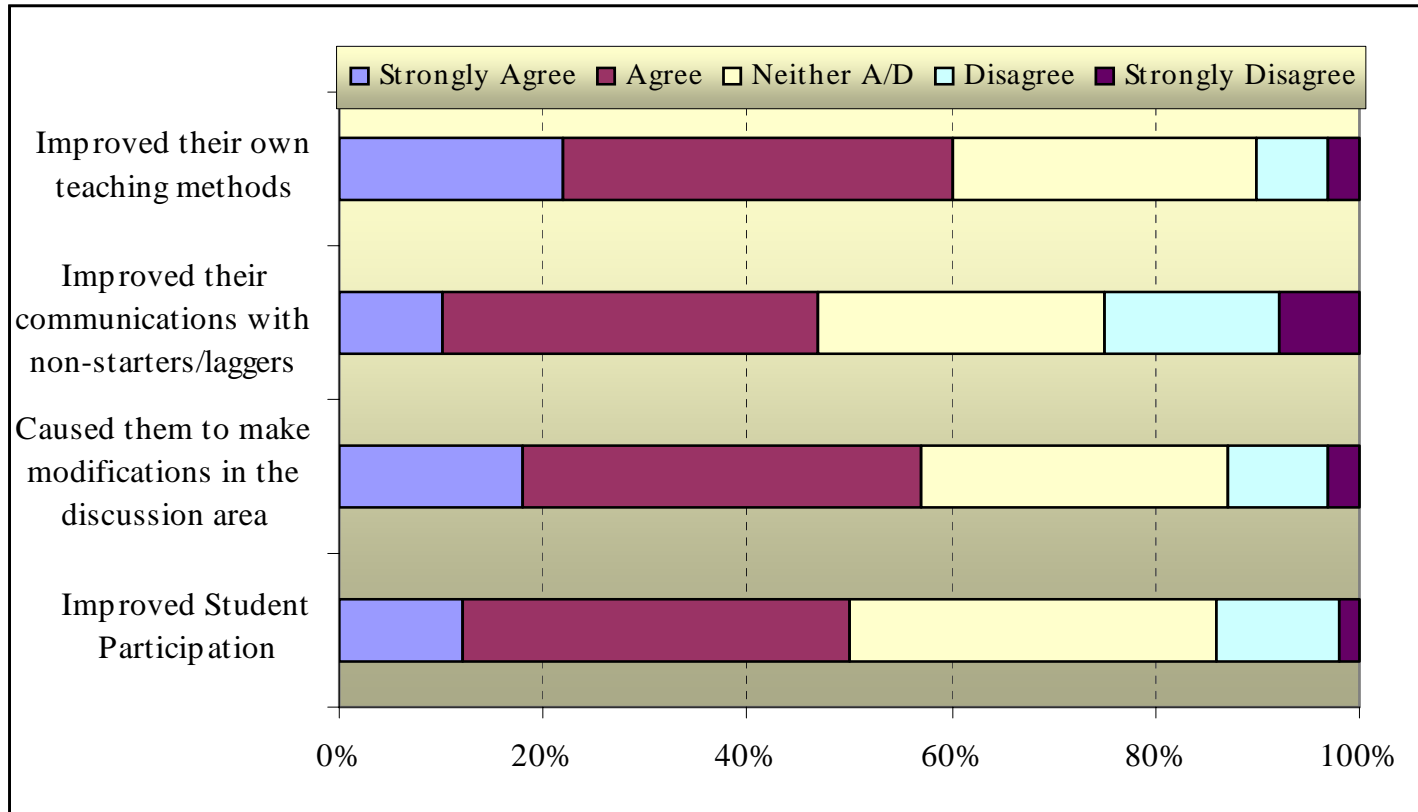
Enhancing Facilitator Understanding



Regarding a Specific Course Section: Facilitator Rating of How QACs Helped Them Better Understand FOR-PD's Roles and Expectations for Facilitators

*Note. Data were obtained from Phase IV QAC Facilitator Survey where 51% of spring 2006 facilitators responded.
(n = 60).*

Facilitators Rate QAC Effectiveness



Regarding a Specific Course Section: Facilitator Responses to Likert-style Items Relating to QAC Effectiveness

*Note. Data were obtained from Phase IV QAC Facilitator Survey where 51% of spring 2006 facilitators responded.
(n = 60).*

Results from QAC Survey

Why they Value QACs--Open-ended Responses

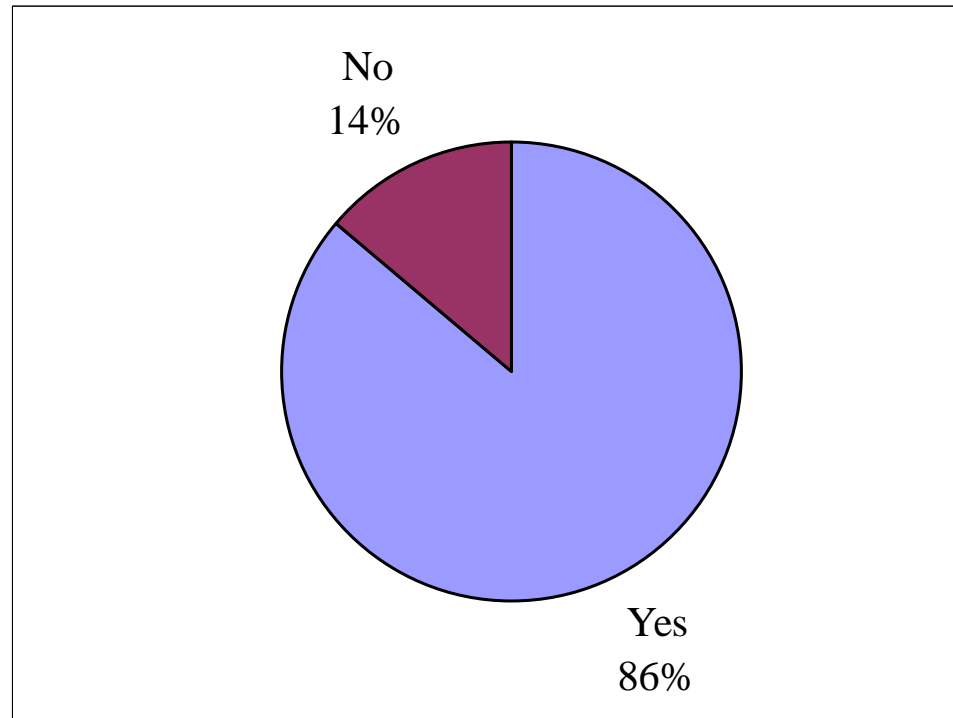
- Most (53%) facilitators felt that QACs **improved course completion rates**
 - *Why do you think the quality assurance checks helped your participants complete the course?* Qualitative analysis revealed two main themes including:
 - 1) QACs **provide extra reinforcement and support for participants** (41% of respondents), and
 - 2) QACs **support and encourage the facilitator** (28% of respondents).

Results from QAC Survey

Why they Value QACs--Open-ended Responses

- “I would assume that accountability is good for everyone. I know there were problems with participants and it helped.”
- “Communication from FOR-PD helped support my e-mails and communication with participants. More interaction.”
- “[QACs] encouraged me to continue to make attempts with those falling behind—even when I was getting discouraged—I saw the positive things I was doing that someone noticed and that helps me continue.”
- “QACs motivate me to improve my role as facilitator, which in turn directly benefits the participants.”
- “I was pleased that I received commendation for my efforts and it reinforced my commitment and that I was doing the right things for my participants.”

Results from QAC Survey Facilitators Value QACs

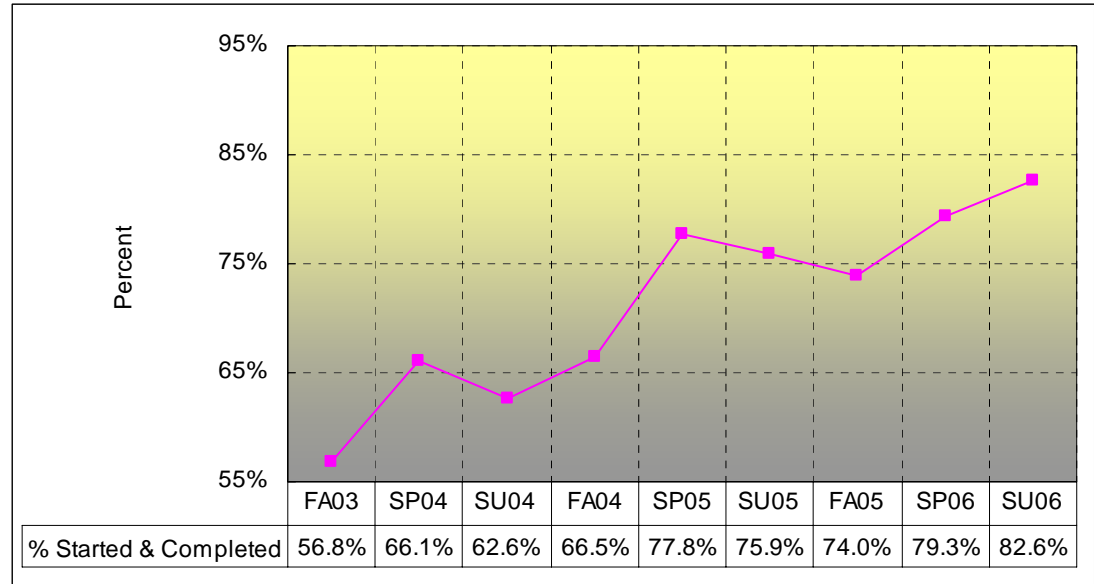


Facilitator Opinion on Whether QACs Should be Continued

*Note. Data were obtained from Phase IV QAC Facilitator Survey where 51% of spring 2006 facilitator responded. Ninety-eight percent of respondents answered this item.
(n = 59)*

FOR-PD Completion Rates

- Completion rates for online professional development are an important issue in evaluating a program's overall effectiveness.
- FOR-PD's average completion rates rose from 62.2% in Phase II to 74.1% in Phase III (FY2004), when QACs were first implemented. They rose again to 78.0% in Phase IV (FY2005) when QACs were further refined.



FOR-PD Average Completion Rates by Semester (Fall04 to Summer06)

Note. Data were obtained from FOR-PD Evaluation Reports. Completion rates are calculated based on the number enrolled who started the course and the number who complete it. (total number of starters for Phase IV and V combined = 9979).

Summary of Results

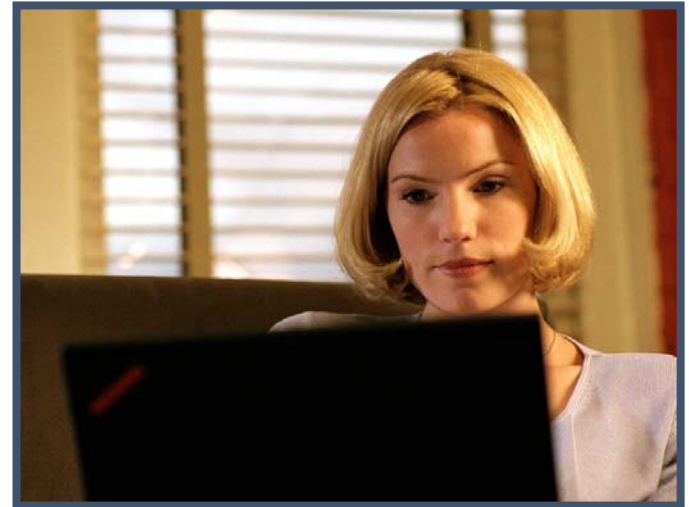
From a Project Perspective

- Although implementing an effective system of quality assurance checks in large-scale online professional development can be expensive and time consuming, it can be well worth the effort.
- QACs can.....
 - Help to frequently **reaffirm project goals** and **keep major roles and responsibilities intact**;
 - Provide **a mechanism for measuring student progress** on a broad-to-narrow scale;
 - Help to **better inform and involve facilitators** in analyzing results and suggesting strategies for change; and
 - Have a **positive impact on overall completion rates**.

Summary of Results, contd.

From a Facilitator Perspective

- QACs provide
 - facilitators with valuable support.
 - positive feedback and encouragement
 - A feeling of connectedness with FOR-PD
 - Improved communications



References

- Crosby, P. B. (1979). *Quality is free*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Patrick, S. & Thompson, M. (2006) *Online K-12: Status, Challenges, and Opportunities*. NACOL presentation at the 12th annual [Sloan-Consortium](#) International Conference on Asynchronous Learning Networks. Orlando, FL.
- Swan, B., Huh, J. & Ramos, R. (August, 2006). *Florida Online Reading Professional Development (FOR-PD) Phase IV Evaluation Results of Surveys*. Orlando FL: University of Central Florida