

BCTF Research Report

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The working conditions of BC teachers working in Distributed Learning: Investigating current issues, concerns, and practices

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Background

Although the BCTF has had policy on distributed learning (DL) since 2001, and technology-related policies since the late 1980s, recent legislative changes and developments in the use of information technology in schools have resulted in rapidly-changing teaching and learning conditions.

In particular Bill 33, introduced in May of 2007, created a new form of regulation of education programs by the Ministry of Education. The legislation did this by requiring in Section 75(4.1) that a board “may provide all or part of an educational program by means of distributed learning only with the prior agreement of the Minister of Education.”

This is a significant change, in keeping with government policy shifts over the last few years that have seen, among other things, more districts involved in distributed learning, greater competition for students, and the opportunity for some students to “shop around” across districts for courses without monitoring by a teacher or parent.

Given the changes in government policy, the rapid expansion of information technology in the delivery of K–12 education, and the limited data and information on the impact of these changes, a multi-method research project exploring the working conditions of BC teachers working in distributed learning was undertaken.

Purpose

The purpose of the project was:

- to explore working conditions for teachers working in distributed-learning programs;
- to identify local similarities and differences in the application of DL at the local level;
- to monitor the implementation and impact of Bill 33 as it relates to distributed learning;
- to assist with the development of a local technology plan;
- to provide members with an overview of current practices across the province;
- to identify the possibilities and challenges of DL.

Methodology

To achieve the aims of this research a number of strategies were used. Seven interviews with individual teachers, and one focus-group session with eight participants, were conducted. The purpose of this data collection was to familiarize ourselves with the various distributed-learning models available in the province, to identify issues related to teacher working conditions in the various districts, and to collect information that could be used in the development of a questionnaire. Interviews were conducted in November 2006 and the focus-group session took place in December. Six of the seven interviews and the focus group were audio-taped, and detailed notes were taken. Whenever possible, interviews were conducted at the interviewee's work location, and on several occasions included a worksite tour. Sections of the interviews and focus-group session were transcribed verbatim. Qualitative data were analyzed using Atlas-ti™, including the extensive comments written on the questionnaires. The questionnaire was administered online in January 2007, and teachers were given three weeks to respond.

One difficulty with administering the questionnaire was identifying the teachers working in distributed learning. There is no record of teachers' assignments in the BCTF member database, and no comprehensive record of DL teachers was available to the researchers from other sources. However, many of the distributed-learning schools posted teacher e-mail addresses to their school web sites. Using these addresses, individual e-mail invitations containing a link to the online questionnaire were sent to all teachers with addresses. Additional recruiting was done through two provincial specialist associations, the BC Educators for Distributed Learning and the Computer Using Educators of BC. Further, local union presidents were requested to inform teachers of the project and pass on the link to any teachers in their local working in Distributed Learning. Finally, e-mail letters were sent to contact persons, usually a district administrator or co-ordinator, for all distributed-learning schools, requesting they pass the link on to DL teachers in their schools.

These techniques resulted in usable responses from 123 teachers. Of the fifty-one districts with DL schools, 36 (70%) were represented. It is estimated that there are about 300 DL teachers in BC, suggesting that our data includes feedback from about one-third of possible respondents. However, the precise number of DL teachers is unknown, and even if the absolute number were known, the sampling frame is not. Accordingly, *this report reflects the opinions and experiences of a significant number of DL teachers, but it is not representative of the opinions and experiences of all DL teachers.*

What is Distributed Learning in BC?

For the purposes of this study, the BC Ministry of Education definition of distributed learning was used. That is, DL refers to "instruction that relies primarily on indirect communication between students and teachers," and includes such modes as correspondence, online learning, teleconferencing, and videoconferencing. To understand current issues in distributed learning it is helpful to review its development in BC.

Kuehn (2003, 2004, 2006) provides a brief history of distributed learning in BC, which, in the form of paper-based correspondence courses distributed by postal mail, can be traced as far back as the early twentieth century. In 1985, the provincial government created nine distance-education schools (originally know as Regional Correspondence Schools), each with responsibility for a separate region of the province. In acknowledgement of the development and expansion of information technology (primarily computers and the internet), in 1998 the

government expanded the number of districts providing DE to eighteen, and changed the name of correspondence education to distance education. Distance education students were funded at half the per-student grant amount of students in face-to-face schools, but only 2,200 students could enrol.

In 2002, government changed the rules again, removing the cap on student enrolments and allowing any district that wanted to, to provide DL to students from any district in the province. They also began funding DL students at the same base-operating-grant-rate as other students. Increased funding and open boundaries during a time of frozen education budgets resulted in greater competition between districts, aggressive recruitment practices, and liberal “incentives” to attract students by some districts.

In 2006, with the introduction of Bill 33, the provincial government tightened control over DL and at the same time expanded its scope within both the public and private education systems. Bill 33 enabled any district to provide distributed learning as long as it signed a Distributed Learning Agreement, valid for one year. Other related aspects of Bill 33 included limits on reimbursements to students and parents, intensified reporting requirements, further blurring of boundaries between public and private education, and a requirement that districts work to achieve 90% participation on Foundations Skills Assessment tests for students in Grades 4 and 7. (See Kuehn 2006 for a detailed analysis.)

The funding formula was also changed. Students in Kindergarten to Grade 9 had to be enrolled in either a face-to-face school or in a DL school, and would be funded on a full-FTE basis. Students in Grades 10 to 12, however, could enrol in either one or the other or both. If enrolled in DL, they would be funded on a per-course basis. This means that prior to Bill 33, a senior-secondary student taking four courses would be fully funded, but starting in the 2006 school year would be funded at one-eighth of the base amount per course.

As is evident in our research findings, these changes have had significant, immediate, and often negative effects on teachers teaching in DL. They have also served to draw attention to such issues as teacher recruitment to DL work assignments, issues of workload or caseload, morale, and job security.

This report presents the experiences and opinions of distributed-learning teachers during a time of uncertainty and change. Many of the issues and concerns will be familiar and applicable to a face-to-face working and learning setting, but the focus here is on the experience of distributed learning teachers in this study. It is hoped the report will facilitate further discussion about working conditions for teachers working in distributed learning.

Study findings

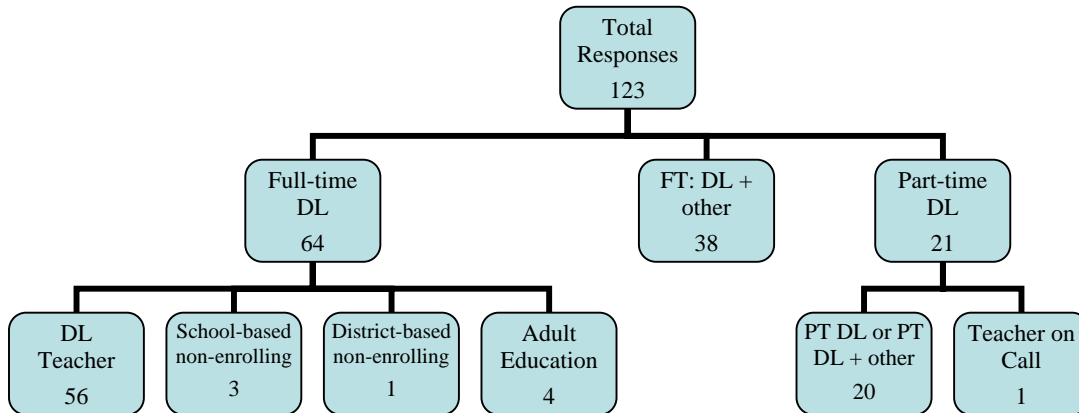
About the respondents

In contrast to the overall teaching population of BC, which is 70% female, only 61% of DL teachers responding to this questionnaire were female. The average number of years of teaching experience was 17.7, which is consistent with the overall population. By comparison, this group had on average 4.6 years of DL teaching experience.

Table 1: Overall teaching experience compared to DL teaching experience.

	Years teaching (%)	Years DL teaching (%)
< 2 years	-	27
2 to 5	9	53
6 to 10	16	11
11 to 15	20	8
16 to 20	16	1
21 to 30`	33	1
> 30	7	-

The majority of respondents (83%) indicated they were teaching on a full-time contract (17% part-time), but this did not mean they were full-time DL teachers. Only 52% of those working full-time were working full-time in DL, and an additional 31% were full-time with part of their assignment in distributed learning. See the chart below for the distribution of respondents by assignment type.



Examples of DL plus other assignments were DL and face-to-face or DL and a specialist-teacher role.

As part of my full-time position, I teach DL technically one block every second day over the 10-month year, equivalency of 0.2.

I also teach 5 classes F2F in a secondary school.

I am the Learning Assistance teacher and do the distributed learning off the side of my desk.

Workload

Distributed learning is excluded from class size and class composition limits. Accordingly, one of the purposes of this research was to explore the issue of class size in distributed learning: What was the average class size for DL teachers? How did class sizes compare to those in face-to-face schools? Are limits for face-to-face classes suitable for distributed-learning classes? What issues of class composition do distributed-learning teachers face?

These were the initial questions guiding the research, but interviews conducted at the beginning of the research project made it clear that talking about class size by itself did not make sense in a DL setting. Class size and composition were best understood in the context of the course-delivery method, the ranges of grades taught, number of students, and variety of courses, issues subsequently explored in more detail through the questionnaire.

Class size

The average class size¹ for secondary teachers was 24 and the average for elementary was 16.2. Given that distributed learning is designed to allow students to take courses based on their schedules, interests, or needs—“access to education anywhere, anytime” according to the Ministry of Education slogan—it is not surprising that some enrolments are very small. For example, some classes had one or two or no more than half-a-dozen students. By contrast, the largest secondary class had 179 students and the largest elementary class had 61. The range (1 to 61 for elementary and 1 to 179 for secondary) provides a bit more information than the average, but neither is a very good reflection of teacher workload.

Grades taught

Questionnaire respondents were asked to identify all grades they currently taught. The majority of respondents—53%—taught at the secondary level (Grades 8 to 12) and 31% taught elementary grades (Kindergarten to Grade 7). A minority of teachers taught all grades (6%) and 10% taught a mix of elementary and secondary. “Mixed” in this report means that teachers taught both elementary and secondary grades, but not necessarily middle school. For example, one respondent taught Grades 7 through 12, and another taught Grades 1, 2, 3, 8 and 9.

Teaching a wide range of grades was common among DL teachers. Among elementary teachers, 83% taught three or more grades, and among secondary teachers 76% taught three to five grades and 24% taught one or two grades.

The breadth of grades taught has obvious implications for workload in terms of course preparation, marking, and communications with students and parents. As these teachers noted, individual teachers know when their workload is too much, but the variability of factors to consider make it difficult to settle on a single number for everyone.

In rural areas, it is impossible to have a student load of 140, considering the students are from all grades and require all subjects. This is an impossible workload for any human.

When does grade span become too great?...I have 34 FTE, a sound number for DL, but consider a span of six grades. What is a “workable” number...?

¹ One orientation course that was required for all students taking online courses in a particular school had 600 students. Because the second-largest class was 179, the orientation course was treated as an outlier for the purposes of this analysis.

Course-delivery method

Complicating the issue of class size is the course-delivery method. Respondents were asked to identify how their courses were delivered. As can be seen in Table 2, course-delivery methods were most typically paper-based, online, or a mix of multiple-delivery methods. Some courses were classroom only (taught by teachers with a part-time DL assignment) and others were delivered through e-mail or were activity-based (e.g., physical education).

Table 2: Course-delivery method

Blended	45%
Online	37%
Paper	12%
Classroom	2%
Activity	1%
All	1%
E-mail	1%

As one teacher pointed out, the delivery methods complicate something as seemingly simple as counting students, and make it difficult to assess workload.

According to our...reporting system, I have 63 courses. That's somewhat inaccurate because at some [grade] levels, I have both paper-based and online courses, which are on different platforms and therefore have different assignments.

Continuous intake

Of the 465 courses identified, over 90% were continuous intake. Continuous intake means that teachers must manage their enrolments on a one-to-one basis. Students can begin a course, submit assignments, or request assistance at any time during the school year. As one teacher pointed out, the dynamics of continuous intake classes are always changing:

Having four grade levels in one block and continuous entry changes the dynamic constantly, and is more challenging than having one class at one level marching through at relatively the same pace at the same time.

And in terms of workload, one teacher argued that each student is in some sense a separate class.

45 students in an online program is huge, and each student basically represents an individual learning plan. Whereas in a regular classroom all students work on the same curriculum together, I have 45 different students doing 45 different things all at the same time, and I'm required to monitor all students' progress in all subject areas at all times. Report cards are a nightmare!!

Continuous intake and the fact that there is a high course-level non-completion rate means that class size or course enrolment is not a good indicator of workload.

How do you put limits on class sizes when you never know how many kids on your roster are actually going to produce work? One could argue that the kids who are not producing also take up the teacher's time as the teacher tries to contact the kids and encourage/support/cajole them to get working!

Class composition

Class composition was identified as an increasingly demanding issue for DL teachers. One group of teachers talked about the “typical” students who enrol in DL as being at the upper and lower ends of a bell curve. “High-end” students, described as highly motivated with ample home support, and clearly-defined education goals, were contrasted with students at the opposite end of the curve who were poorly motivated, had few supports outside of the DL school, and had not succeeded in face-to-face school settings. It was suggested that while the high-end group was relatively stable in terms of student numbers, the high-needs group was getting larger.

Getting more and more special needs students registering that require additional support, resources and time commitments. Caseloads too high, especially for secondary teachers!

Being used by district to take overflow students from regular system. Often these late arrivals to the regular system are the least academically-able students.

While DL teachers in this study argue that distributed learning plays a role for students with special needs—for example it “keeps kids in the system when the regular school system has failed them”—the phenomenon of “dumping the problem kids” into DL appears to be on the rise and should be flagged as an issue to be monitored.

I’m concerned that our program may be seen as a dumping ground for students not finding success in other programs. If other districts are seeing this occurring, then I’d like to see the BCTF supporting policies that encourage more careful intake criteria for DL programs.

Workload and class size

Demonstrating the complexity of DL-teacher workload is an important outcome of this study. As one teacher said, “each person’s workload is different depending on the job they do, grade level, etc....” It also depends on number of grades taught, the variety of courses, student numbers and composition, and delivery method.

We were curious to compare the issues of class size and caseload with overall workload, and so asked these two questions on the questionnaire. Respondents could choose a level of satisfaction from 1 (unsatisfied) to 6 (satisfied).

Table 3: Percent satisfaction with...

	unsatisfied			satisfied		
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Number of students in your class(es) or on your caseload	17	11	25	14	19	14
Overall workload	14	19	21	17	18	12

When asked about their level of satisfaction with “the number of students in their classes or on their caseload,” over half (53%) of the teachers chose a rating of 3 or less. The same percentage rated their overall workload the same way.

Work location and work setting

Working from home

DL teachers have face-to-face interaction with their students and some DL schools have site visits or drop-in classes built into the curriculum. But DL teachers are typically not teaching in a classroom on a day-to-day basis, and have more flexibility in terms of work location than do classroom-based teachers.

According to the survey results, 12% of respondents work from home during the regular workday. Typically, DL teachers who worked at home were permitted to do so one or two days per week.

In one case, a teacher preferred to work from home because it was possible to arrange online interactions with students for the early evening when they were most likely to be doing their course work. But, as was the case for another teacher, working from home was not always ideal.

Because I am teaching more than one online course, I have lost my full-time classroom. This means that I must work in the noisy staff room, or go home. Neither place contains the books, files, and reference material that I store in my classroom. Without a workspace of my own, I am far less organized than I should be. I haven't eaten lunch in the staff room with my colleagues in four months because lunch is the only undisturbed time I have in my classroom.

While the majority of interviewees agreed that “online teachers should be able to work from their home for certain periods of time,” they also recognized the possible problems with such arrangements. One teacher talked about the perception it could create that DL teachers were not working, or perhaps not working very hard, because they were at home. This teacher also talked briefly about the fairness to colleagues who did not have the same kind of flexibility because they were in face-to-face classrooms.

One survey respondent commented on the provision of “software, internet connection, computer, etc.” and the fact that “it is expected we can use our own material at home to do the school’s work.”

Work location and residence

Another aspect of work location explored in this study was where teachers worked compared to where they lived. To answer this question we asked for the district in which teachers taught and the district in which they lived. Eleven respondents did not live in the same district they taught in. The data were not detailed enough to calculate distance from work site to main residence, but typically the two were neighbouring districts. One exception was a teacher who worked in one district and lived a ferry-ride away in a different district.

Work setting—space

Our interest in where DL teachers typically worked during the usual school day led to discussions of work setting at DL schools. During the interview phase of the project, we were able to visit four DL school sites. In two of the sites, teachers worked within a common area and did not have personal offices, and at one site teachers had individual cubicles without ceiling or doors. One teacher working in a “open plan” model appreciated the opportunities for interactions with colleagues.

What really makes it work is that all the teachers are working together in one room, right, because then you have that collegial conversation about situations

that arise, you can problem-solve right away....I think a good DL model works with all the teachers together in a space.

However, it was recognized that teachers needed private spaces to work face-to-face with students or to make calls to families.

I work in an open office and at times would like a closed-in office to do my online oral work with children, and to be in a more private setting for calls with families.

Overall, few respondents or interviewees mentioned the physical plant within which they worked, but one did mention the school facility was in need of upgrading.

Poor facility—I have to bring in my own space heater to stay moderately warm. We blow fuses regularly since old building cannot support tech.

Work setting—ergonomics

We asked about satisfaction with ergonomics required to do distributed-learning work. Teachers recognized the necessity of paying attention to such things, but it was not frequently mentioned.

Ergonomics—encourage teachers take time to exercise during the day/lunch. Too much sitting and typing causes physical health problems.

Almost 70% of survey respondents were satisfied with their ergonomic working conditions.

Table 4: Percent satisfaction with...

	unsatisfied					satisfied	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Physical condition of your work space	3	15	15	16	22	29	
Ergonomic requirements for your work.....	6	12	14	28	28	13	

Personal safety

One final aspect of work location had to do with personal safety. The variability of work locations was raised as a potential safety issue for teachers who were on their own for site or home visits.

Home visits, travel, working conditions of DE teachers are different than regular classroom teachers, particularly in rural areas. Some concern over safety and contact with school base during home visit sessions, which sometimes extend over several days.

Hours worked

No usable data were collected on the total number of hours worked per week; however, written comments suggested that length of the work week for teachers was problematic.

Although I only have a 0.8 FTE, I am expected to be in the office from 8:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m. If I worked 1.0 FTE, I would have to be in the office from 8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Even though there is nothing written about this in contract form, it would be greatly frowned-upon by administration if I worked an actual 0.8 day as a public-school teacher would.

I could easily work many, many more hours and never be caught up (I simply refuse to be a slave).

Almost 45% of all survey respondents reported working at home after regular school hours during a normal work week.

Time away but not time off

Another aspect of workload was related to time off and the fact that DL teachers often work twelve months of the year instead of ten.

We are open 12 months a year. I work part of the summer and am allowed to choose my own holidays throughout the regular 10-month school year. However, when I take my time off, I come back to work that was done by students or work that piled up while I was away. It is like I got time away from work, but not time off work as teachers in the regular schools do. When they come back from summer break, they are starting up with a clean slate; no...mark[ing] or phone calls to catch-up on, etc. When I come back from Christmas or spring break or one of my holidays, I have to get caught up in my marking for those students who worked during that time. We do not get enough relief.

Running a 12-month school with 10-month employees. This requires working during the summer and then trying to find a time-period to take off during the school year to compensate. This is often difficult as your work piles up during the time you take off.

Funding

As noted previously, the funding formula was changed with Bill 33, so that now DL for senior-secondary students is funded on a per-course basis. Also, at the upper-secondary-level, students may take courses wherever they choose. For example, a student may be enrolled in a face-to-face school on a full-time basis (four of eight courses qualifies) and also enrol in courses in a distributed learning school in a different district. Under these rules, a student could generate up to 1.5 FTE of funding. However, whereas in the past a DL school was most likely to receive funding for the student at a specified base grant amount, now the school will only receive one-eighth of the block-amount per course. Reporting requirements have also changed, so that student counts must be taken four times during the year for Grades 10 to 12 and three times for Grades K to 9. In order to be included for funding purposes, a student must be “actively” engaged with each course. Active is defined as follows:

Grades K–9 student files must contain evidence that a student is active at the snapshot to claim funding. The evidence must be reflective of the amount of time the student has been in the program. For students enrolling within 3 weeks of a snapshot, the minimum evidence is a learning plan and a letter of commitment from a parent.

Grades 10–12 student files must contain:

A clearly-articulated learning plan that links to learning outcomes, performance standards, required resources, interests and needs. The learning plan will demonstrate how required areas of study will be met, will include the teacher’s plan for learning activities, and will demonstrate the student’s commitment to learning.

At least one example of two-way communication between the teacher and student, following completion of the leaning plan. Evidence of communications can include e-mail, telephone, face-to-face, computer-mediated conferencing, discussion boards, and student work submission.

At least one substantive assignment submitted to the teacher by the student.

It is difficult to untangle the relationship between funding formula changes, changes due to the proliferation of DL schools, and overall enrolment decline. However, the new formula for Grades 10, 11, and 12 has had an impact throughout the system. As this elementary school teacher notes, it has also had an impact on elementary distributed-learning programs as districts attempt to adjust to revenue changes.

The changes in the Grade 10–12 funding model to per-course funding based on activity has been crippling to all DL schools this year! As an elementary teacher, I see the trickle down to our elementary programs, where we are short-staffed and overloaded with students to help compensate for a lack of funding in our secondary programs.

One interviewee suggested that because of the formula changes, the student FTE in that district has dropped by one-third at the senior-secondary level. Accordingly, the DL schools are short-staffed and some commented on the possibility of losing teachers next year.

The changes in funding of courses this year has greatly stressed distributed learning schools. The school no longer has money enough to employ the needed teachers. Our class loads are continuing to rise, and will keep rising because there will be teachers who will not be re-hired next year because of budget constraints.

Certainly an issue for all teachers but a precarious one for DL teachers if funding is the driving force behind staffing. Numbers fluctuate throughout the year and initial staffing considered in relation to September 30 enrolment.

Although job security was raised in interviews by a number of teachers and was mentioned several times in the written comments, when asked about their level of satisfaction with job security on the questionnaire, 84% indicated they were either somewhat satisfied or satisfied with their job security. It may be that, given the average years of seniority most DL teachers have overall, compared to within a DL setting, their concerns are with job security within distributed learning and not within their district.

Technical support

Just over 69% of survey respondents said that they received adequate technical support, but according to written comments and interviewees, not all DL schools provided sufficient onsite support on a regular basis. Some teachers reported that they had taught themselves to deal with most technical problems or would rely on colleagues for assistance.

We have to rely on fellow teachers to help with technical issues. That means that they have to take time away from their regular duties. This is not fair to them.

I am not a “computer person,” so I need a great deal of help setting up discussion forums, etc. This does not fit into regular pro-d days. Some of my coworkers have

been very kind and helpful. However, my needs have not been assessed by admin nor time provided.

The survey question about adequate technical support had one respondent “laughing out loud—lol.”

lol...I provide the technical support for my colleagues off the side of my desk over and above my caseload/workload. There needs to be a support person beyond a full-time teacher with a heavy caseload/workload to provide support to our teachers and myself. There is a need for an adequate tracking system for audit purposes...I've created database structures for each of our DE teachers...off the side of my desk.

Another teacher wrote that given the constantly changing platforms and software tools used for online communication and instruction, there was a “need to upgrade the technology systems [teachers] work with” and to provide training on new systems. Timeliness was also an issue.

[Support is] variable. For example, as we move into using new programs...we may get training but it's not necessarily when staff need it; rather it tends to be delivered when the presenter has time. This really isn't satisfactory. Day-to-day tech support of hardware tends to be good.

The answer...is actually “Yes” and “No.” Our technician is great, but we only have ONE technician for a school of 50 staff! [This person] is overworked! We also have one teacher who is our educational technician (deals with new programs, software, the learning end), who is also extremely busy!

Teacher training

As was noted earlier, many of the teachers, despite having on average almost 20 years’ teaching experience, are relatively new to the area of DL. Further, teachers in distributed learning rely on technology to a much greater extent than do their colleagues in other schools. Accordingly, we wanted to explore the area of training for DL teachers, not only to solve minor technical issues but also to use the multiple computer programs and systems that are constantly changing.

When asked if they had adequate training for the work they do, 63% of respondents said they did. We then asked respondents to tell us the amount and kind of training they received during the current school year. The vast majority of respondents said that training was often sporadic and that they were either “self-taught” or received training from colleagues. The following comments show the range of training received—from none to “a fair amount”—and range of providers.

I have been provided with a fair amount of technical training and support. Scheduled and unscheduled training sessions usually occur during office hours, and are usually provided by other staff within the school. Additional training has been provided by software providers.

None. I came in during my summer vacation to learn our new [management system]. Another teacher showed me the basics but this wasn't an organized training session.

We have local in-service training sessions on a weekly basis. Our school hosted a [particular system] trainer to do a 3-day workshop, but for the most part teachers

need to seek out virtual training sessions online and other teachers in the field to learn the tools of the trade and how to use them.

Little—on the most part, it is expected or assumed that teachers take the initiative.

I have learned (been trained) to use the programs I need to carry out my job over the past three years here but there is much more that I would like to learn to enhance my programs.

The most valuable form of training I receive is done in mentorship fashion with other people I work with. Having more release time to work with other teachers in DL would be very valuable. Formally, training with the [particular] program was provided.

We received two days training at the beginning of the year. Now that I'm actually using the programs I could use more in-service.

Teacher Professional Development

Questionnaire respondents were asked to provide information on the kind and amount of professional development they received during the current school year. Many respondents mentioned off-site activities such as conferences and workshops. The most-frequently mentioned conference was the BCED Online conference that is hosted by the consortium of BC school districts of the same name. The mandate of the consortium, according to their web site, is to act “as a broker of information, resources and professional learning services” for professionals in distributed learning. Online conferences hosted by other provinces and by various BCTF provincial specialist associations were also mentioned.

A number of respondents mentioned online “webinars,” courses taken for academic credit through local universities, workshops held by software proprietors, and seminars and workshops involving “professionals” from the field.

Some teachers mentioned that their professional-development activities were paid by themselves, while others received funds or partial funds. Structural barriers such as childcare responsibilities, time, distance, and funding were issues raised by a few respondents.

As a parent of young children, due to daycare arrangements, I do not have the freedom to go to Alberta or even to Vancouver for full-day conferences. There needs to be more professional development and in-service on a regional or local basis. I have had to seek out my own support. For example, I hired a local computer specialist for a day to teach me how to use [a particular program] so I could better deliver web content. I used my own funds and did a self-directed day to accomplish this.

[We need] funds for training DL teachers—because we have very specific needs as DL teachers, we have to travel long distances to receive adequate and appropriate training. Because of budget constraints, I am unable to go to DL conferences, etc.

Professional autonomy and intellectual property

Course modification—“making usable courses”

Just over 60% of survey respondents said they had been involved in the modification of distributed learning courses, and 20% of this group said they had received some form of compensation for that work. The most common form was time in lieu; some teachers were paid for their work but most were not.

I was paid on scale for a two-week contract to enhance an existing DL course so that it would complement a more diverse learning community.

Almost all of the modification, which is school-based, is off the side of my desk (and this seems to be the greatest need) and unpaid.

One major project [particular course] took approx. 200 hours and I received three days off in lieu.

Others viewed course modifications as part of their professional responsibility and did not expect to be compensated beyond their usual salary.

I wouldn't expect any compensation for taking a neutral or another person's course, and making it my own. That is a professional responsibility and part of the job.

I expect every teacher needs to modify courses to fit the students. I think of it as part of the job unless it becomes too time-consuming.

Modifications are not written into my job description. However, if there is a problem with a course I am teaching, I have to fix it because no one else will. I am making modifications to my online courses at least three times a week.

Course development

While respondents were less likely to receive compensation of some kind for course modification, which many perceived as part of their job, compensation for course development was more prevalent. Just over 60% of survey respondents said they had been involved in the development of distributed learning courses and 42% of this group said they had received some form of compensation for their work. It was common for teachers to be paid for course development but time in lieu was also common.

I was given two weeks' release time to develop my course. (I spent months on it, however.) I was paid \$3,000.00 as a private contractor.

I was contracted to help with the development of [particular course]—\$4,000 for about 150 hours of work.

I did some editing for Open School and received payment. However, most of the time I am not compensated, e.g., I wrote [two programs] for our school off the side of my desk—it took about a month to write each unit.

Some “days in lieu.” In other words, I can take days off. The issue is that the workload is still there, so days off really means “work from home.” The days are minimal compared to the work required. This year, course developed without days in lieu because it was felt that I had too many already from having worked days in the summer.

Teacher-on-call coverage for distributed-learning teachers was problematic because most TOCs did not have training or background in the software or course being taught online. As one teacher noted,

I was allowed seven days of TOC coverage. This turned out to be a complete waste of time, because there were no trained TOC's in our district, so I spent some time each day training the TOC, only to be told I couldn't call him back in again because our district wants young teachers "in the classroom." ...In addition, everyone knew I was in the building, so if they had questions they came to see me.

Compensation for course development varied significantly across districts, and for some was nonexistent.

[There is] no compensation for new courses developed. In my three years at [DL school] I have developed five new courses from scratch...This saves our school thousands of dollars, since we no longer have to purchase these courses from Open School (which still sells crappy courses written in the '80s;...—this is another major issue), however, no compensation for this work is offered.

Copyright ownership

Only 17% of teachers indicated that issues of copyright ownership had arisen with regard to course modification or development. Not surprisingly, when asked how issues of copyright ownership were managed, the answers ranged from informal agreements on an individual basis to formal contracts; as two respondents said, it ranges from “no one notices” to a “course development contract covers [ownership].”

Who owns the course is spelled out in the contract. If a teacher spends their own time to develop a course, that course is deemed to be owned by them. If a teacher gets paid extra to develop a course, the course then becomes the property of the school district. This is all agreed upon before the teacher develops the course. It seems fair to us.

Several respondents indicated that the school district claimed ownership.

The District believes that any intellectual material that is created as a result of our job (even if on own time), the district owns it.

It has been indicated that anything written is the property of the school.

A common theme throughout the interviews and on the questionnaires was concern about barriers to sharing materials between teachers. As one teacher said, as long as the material can be freely shared between colleagues, they did not have concerns about payment or ownership. However, some teachers said they did not want the school district to profit from their work.

I am concerned as I am only a Term Contract—who gets the work I have developed? I have no interest in sharing with [particular DL school] who can make money from this for free.

I've developed an entire [particular] course that I'm very proud of and feel I should own—I'd gladly share with other teachers if asked, but I would be very disturbed if any attempt to “can” the course was made. I don't see it happening though as my course depends on teacher involvement in weekly discussions. It's very interactive, not just uploaded content.

Professional autonomy

Interview discussions of course modification and development led to a more general discussion of professional autonomy. Interviewees were clear that an important skill for teachers working in distributed learning was the ability to modify existing courses to suit student needs, their teaching style and goals, and/or to develop existing or new courses for online delivery. Although not linked directly to course modification and development on the questionnaire, we asked survey respondents about their satisfaction with professional autonomy. As shown in Table 5, survey respondents were for the most part very satisfied, with 90% choosing a rating of four or higher and 75% selecting the top two ratings.

Table 5: Percent satisfaction with ...

	unsatisfied				satisfied	
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Professional autonomy	1	3	6	15	36	39

Although many DL teachers have felt a high degree of professional autonomy, new ministry requirements and audits may change this.

Hiring models for DL teachers

One of the areas we were interested in was how distributed learning teaching positions are filled. We explored this in some detail with the interviewees by asking them to discuss how they came to be working in distributed learning, and then to reflect on the possible impact of Bill 33 and the Learning Agreement each district must sign. According to the agreement, school districts must “only employ Teachers delivering all or part of an educational program through Distributed Learning who have experience or training in teaching using Distributed Learning methods.”

When interviewees were asked to talk about how they came to be DL teachers, we were not surprised that fifteen respondents provided fifteen different paths to DL teaching. In general, though, while some DL teachers moved into the field out of necessity, others gravitated toward DL out of interest. For example, one respondent became involved in DL as a result of being “surplus to needs” at another school. Another had been a “part-time teacher needing more time” who applied for and got a part-time DL position. A third interviewee had been teaching in alternate education and as that program evolved toward a DL model, so too did the teaching position. Common among all stories of these 15 participants was their belief in the value of distributed learning and its uniqueness as a teaching area.

This discussion of how one becomes a DL teacher prompted interviewees to reflect on hiring practices. Three hiring “models” emerged. One model was that teachers with an aptitude or interest in alternative delivery methods “found” DL early on and stayed with it. This group of teachers was motivated to learn over time the technical aspects of distributed learning, and found the DL environment personally a good fit that benefited the teachers, their programs, and their students.

A second model was, on several occasions, both in interviews and in written comments on the questionnaire, referred to as the “dumping ground” for teachers who had nowhere else to go. Teachers who were “burnt out” and no longer effective in a face-to-face classroom were sent to the DL school because there was little or no student-teacher “real-time” interaction.

The third model, hypothesized to become the dominant model with the policy changes in Bill 33, is that new and often younger teachers who have taken DL-related course work in university as part of their teacher training will be hired into DL positions over other, more-experienced teachers. The fear expressed by several study participants was that these new teachers would not have sufficient classroom experience to be “good” teachers.

Being separated from our students is extremely demanding pedagogically. Unless a teacher has huge experience in the classroom, it would be very difficult to work here.

Relationships with non-DL colleagues

The different models and pathways into DL served as markers for a number of issues for DL teachers. One was the perception among DL teachers that their colleagues in face-to-face schools did not understand the role of distributed learning in BC’s public education system.

Acknowledgement and acceptance that DL is a valid, valuable, and authentic form of educational delivery which is to be celebrated and affirmed rather than being marginalized and vilified as some sort of rogue/pariah program. In other words, an acknowledgment that DL is here to stay.

Educating non-DL teachers about what DL really is. Being supportive of teaching in diverse ways to meet diverse needs. Not all students learn best face-to-face, not all learn best in DL environment, and not all in a blended model.

Further, some thought that colleagues in face-to-face schools did not understand or respect the work DL teachers were doing. As one teacher commented, “Other teachers do not understand our work, workload, conditions of work, etc. Many make insensitive comments like ‘How does it feel to be retired?’ ”

[We need] understanding that DL teachers are a valued member of the educational team—there seems to be a stigma against DL teachers as being less important.

That what we do is far different than traditional public school teachers and we need to be recognized and understood for the quality service we provide with a different delivery model and whole different infrastructure.

The DL environment is a fascinating, fast-paced place to work because the technology forces us to be constantly changing, learning, and developing new things. For teachers dedicated to being learners themselves, this is a fabulous place for those life-long learners. Unfortunately, we still bear the burden of the stereotypes of the past. Many in the bricks-and-mortar schools or school-district offices have no idea how DL is developing and how we have progressed beyond the old correspondence marker-model system. Some people still see our DL schools as a “Retirement Home,” a place to go when you are tired of teaching. This couldn’t be farther from the truth. DL requires teachers who are committed to change and growth in a positive, collaborative workplace. This alternative environment is exciting and scary!

Several respondents speculated that this attitude was because of a lack of understanding among their colleagues about what DL teachers did on a day-to-day basis. There was a need for:

An understanding and appreciation of the DL environment—what it’s like to teach online, the challenges and difficulties faced by DL teachers in providing quality and effective education programs to a wide variety of learners.

There was a need for better understanding of the level of expertise and training required to do DL work and a willingness to accept that distributed learning was different but not inferior. This attitude was thought to extend to the BCTF representatives and elected officials.

The lack of understanding/empathy on the part of regular brick-and-mortar teachers/schools, and even the BCTF (perception that DL programs are stealing students away from public schools or somehow corrupting the whole idea of public education).

Others thought it stemmed from an erroneous belief that distributed-learning teachers would “steal” other teachers’ jobs.

I am very concerned that there is a backlash from teaching colleagues who are concerned that DL schools are taking their jobs.

We are not going to take teachers’ jobs away from them, nor are we stealing students.

One respondent drew attention to a BCTF Executive Committee decisions document that, from this teacher’s perspective, reinforced this belief. Item #4 of the document states:

That distributed learning programs not be promoted as better than classroom-based programs or be used to replace classroom-based programs in schools. (May 2006)

Whatever the intention behind the BCTF Executive decision, the wording of the item was perceived by some DL teachers to be unfair and unsupportive of their work rather than facilitating the “development of policies that honour this alternate form of public education.”

Further, a number of suggestions to remedy this situation were made.

When gains are made for teachers in their working and learning conditions, rarely are DL teachers mentioned. DL schools are growing, provide a valuable service for students and adults to become educated. In all areas the BCTF works, we should not be forgotten.

Education of other teachers so they don’t see DL as a threat to their job security.

The BCTF needs to educate the executive and the local executives to ensure they understand and have an appreciation for the workload and service DE provides. Negative comments and communication by members at meetings tend to alienate DE teachers. An education program is needed—starting at the TOP.

This lengthy quote is a good summary of many of the comments from interviewees and survey respondents.

An awareness among other teachers and associations that DL has become a highly specialized field and is not the place to drop teachers in to accommodate them due to personal or professional reasons. When we get a person like that coming in or a teacher applying for a posted position who gets it because of seniority and not skill-set, which has happened five times since I have been here, we all spend inordinate amounts of time getting that person up to speed, fixing

their computer, or training them how to use simple programs that should already be known. We can't get our work done. Our Association and teachers in our district are under the assumption that this is an easy place to work and anyone can do it. I and my colleagues beg to differ. We are treated as second-class teachers who are not doing the same amount of work as them, or have the same stresses. We do not have the same stresses as them; we have different ones. And these stresses are just as real. We need trained teachers coming in here with both their educational degrees and a solid foundation in computer skills and troubleshooting technology problems that arise. There is also the belief that you can increase class size in our environment. You can't. The nature of the job requires a lowering of class-size compared to the regular classroom.

The issue of formalized training or credentials was raised by a number of interviewees in the context of the nature of DL work and the requirement outlined in the ministry Learning Agreement that teachers have either training or experience to work in distributed learning. It was thought the BCTF should take a more active role in assisting with teacher professional development and training in the area of distributed learning.

There is no standardized or recognized training in DL. As most districts "create" their program to fit their area's needs, what is out there for teachers to receive the training in order to deliver a quality program?

BCTF—should be working with partners to establish a training program for teachers who wish to be qualified to work in a DE environment....The skill set for a DE teacher is NOT the same as a classroom teacher. There should be a criteria teachers need to meet in order to work in this specialty area—just like there is to have teachers teach Math....However, once the criteria is established—there needs to be a means for teachers to receive those qualifications....The BCTF in partnership with other groups, should work towards establishing the guideline and developing the program. This is a growing area of education and should be embraced and molded—not fought!!!

Change

A common theme throughout the study was change. Respondents talked about how quickly the area of distributed learning is changing as a result of developments in information technology, as well as from government policy and legislation changes.

During my five years in DL, I have seen huge changes to my job. We are responsible for learning new technologies and delivery models mostly on our own, through trial and error. I see new people come in every year who are provided with little or no training. That, coupled with the heavy workload, makes for very stressful working conditions.

DL is changing rapidly and the stress caused by these changes needs to be recognized, and support given to staff in this area.

Our program has changed a great deal over the last ten years and has changed from a schooling-at-home support program (begun when our District closed a very small rural school) to a program of last resort for learners not finding success in their local schools.

Competition

Another theme to emerge from discussion and on the questionnaires was competition. Bill 33 facilitates and encourages competition between school districts. Some of the ways it does this is by allowing senior-secondary students to select their own courses, allowing students to enrol in any district they choose, in public or private schools. One example of competition is the renaming of a school in Kamloops to “@KOOL” so that the name would always appear at the top of an alphabetically-sorted list, although subsequently a decision was made to randomly display school lists on the centralized webpage for distributed-learning schools. Competition was also discussed in terms of its impact on teacher culture—as damaging to the “culture of sharing” that typifies the teaching profession—and its impact on student learning.

There are new programs popping up all over the place in BC school districts. We are all competing against each other.

With the structure of the funding model for education, and student accessibility to programs of choice, the government has set up distance ed schools to be extremely competitive. As a result we are generally possessive of our programs and course work....Many organizations are all doing similar work [and] this has made the teachers in DL schools much more like workers in a business. We are constantly reminded that if our work is not excellent we will lose out. This cloud of competitiveness is pervasive and not healthy for learning, students, or the state of the education system.

Conclusions

An exploration of the working conditions of teachers working in distributed learning reveals the complexity of teacher workload, a rapidly-changing and competitive work environment, and the impact of policy and legislation changes, in particular as related to education funding. The study also hints at the impact of the shifting landscape on students, changing work patterns for teachers, and the increasing need for active, supportive involvement of the Federation in the area of distributed learning.

Understanding class size and composition in a distributed-learning context was one of the initial research questions. The study showed that talking about class size and composition separate from overall workload did not make sense. Rather, class size and composition were best understood in the context of the course-delivery method, the ranges of grades taught, number of students, and variety of courses. Continuous intake means that often each student is in this sense a separate class, making class size a poor indicator of workload.

Workload is also linked with teachers’ ability to modify and develop online curricula, which in turn is related to the timeliness and adequacy of training and professional development. Being able to take the time and having the skills necessary to do course modification and development work were issues raised in the study. Not surprisingly, rapidly-changing delivery platforms and software tools were also workload issues.

While many teachers (60%) undertake course modification and course development work, comparatively few are compensated for this work (modification: 20%; development: 42%). Although only a few DL teachers (17%) indicated that issues related to copyright ownership had arisen, interviews indicated there are no clear and consistent guidelines for managing copyright ownership.

Teachers working in distributed learning recognize the role DL can play for students whose needs are not met in a face-to-face classroom setting, but respondents expressed the concern that the “typical” students who enrol in DL are those at the upper and lower ends of a bell curve and that DL was increasing being used as a “dumping ground” for high-needs students. Repeatedly it was stated that DL is not for all students, but fills an important need in the overall public education system.

It was when talking about the role of DL in public education that the perception of tensions between teachers working and DL and their non-DL colleagues were raised. It was thought more awareness of the work of DL teachers and more explicit support from the Federation was warranted.

This study is a first step toward understanding the issues faced by teachers working in distributed learning, and it is clear that more work in this area is needed. In particular, a next step could be further research into the diversity of distributed-learning models within British Columbia and across Canada. A Distributed Learning Symposium hosted by the BCTF in the spring of 2007 suggests that, although BC is in some respects a leader in the area of working conditions in DL, much can be learned from the models developed in other jurisdictions. Further, there were significant sampling limitations in this study that should be addressed in any subsequent surveys of teachers working in distributed learning.

References

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The above reports are available on the BCTF web site, at bctf.ca/publications.aspx?id=5630#Technology.

Appendix A: Distributed Learning: School summaries—BC

The following summaries were taken from school and district web pages.

Kelowna, School District 23—*Central School*—eschoolbc.com

Kelowna's *Central School* has been offering online courses since 1999. *Central School* offers courses for Grades 10–12 as a supplement to regular school. Students register on a per-course basis for courses that they cannot take otherwise, due to scheduling or availability problems. Students must be residents of BC to be eligible to enrol in this free program.

Courses are offered in two formats that are dependent on student numbers. The first is asynchronous, or independent, where students work alone and make their own schedules. Regular meetings are not required, although a teacher is available to help should the student request it. The second format is synchronous, or teacher-led. These courses are offered whenever there are enough students registered to start the same course at the same time. In this format, students participate in regularly-scheduled, online meetings with their teachers. They use Elluminate™ software, enabling real-time conversations via the Internet. Course content and support is found using WebCT technology.

The courses all utilize media-rich online resources, online discussions, and in some cases, hands-on labs. All teachers have office hours, if students have queries that need to be answered. There are online links available to tutorials and video explanations of various subject matter.

Kamloops, School District 73—*@KOOL*—kool.sd73.bc.ca

*The policy and information handbook for *@KOOL* is under revision, so more in-depth details are not currently available online.*

Kamloops's *@KOOL* has been offering online courses since 1998. They accept full-time students from Kindergarten to Grade 12, and also allow students in Grades 8–12 to register on a per-course basis. The courses at *@KOOL* are offered to students in SD 73 and across the province.

For students in Kindergarten to Grade 3, socialization is a priority, so there are many group activities for children to meet with others. There are many materials and programs to support distance learning with this age group, and teachers are regularly in contact with parents and children via interviews, e-mails, phone, and group messaging. Computers, for this age group, are an augmentation.

Courses use paper-based, computer-based, and online resources and students are supported with tutorials and feedback. Students communicate with their teachers via e-mail, and can also use Elluminate™ real-time conversations on the computer for Math tutoring. Otherwise, course content can be found using WebCT programming. There are also drop-in sessions available with the Learning Assistance teacher. *@KOOL* also assists schools outside SD 73 in meeting their online learning needs.

Courtenay, School District 71—*North Island Distance Education School*— nides.bc.ca

North Island Distance Education School has served distance and now distributed-learning needs since 1988. They serve school districts 47, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 84, and 85, as well as all BC residents traveling outside of the province. In order to register, you must be a BC resident, unless you are a paying international student.

NIDES offers courses for Kindergarten to Grade 12, both as a full-time option, and on a per-course basis for secondary students. They also provide adult education. Kindergarten–Grade 9 courses are offered in a blended style, using paper-based and online curriculum and providing frequent opportunities for social interaction. A home facilitator (parent) leads these grades, but support teachers are in contact through mail, e-mail, phone, online classrooms, regional support teacher visits, and other face-to-face meetings. The online interactions can be either synchronous, using Elluminate™, or asynchronous, using discussion boards. Teachers provide ongoing feedback and evaluation. There are also e-class options in three regions, which offer more frequent interactions with peers and support teachers, as well as guest speakers. There is also an elementary Learning Assistance teacher available.

There are a number of options for secondary students at *NIDES*. The basic program is a self-paced, self-directed, paper-based distance education program. Students can obtain teacher tutorial support via e-mail or the telephone. The CoNNect program is a teacher-led program for full-time students. It is both online and paper-based, and involves more peer interaction and assessment. Field trips and workshops are also available. There is e-class available for students in Grades 7–10, which is more home-school based, with weekly interactions. Students can also take individual courses for Grades 10–12, as well as do course challenges. Flex-study is another option at *NIDES*, helping students get credit for a course they are already doing at their regular school.

On all of the application forms, there is an option to sign up for a weekly interaction day. *NIDES* provides computer loans to those who need a computer, as well as free dial-up internet access. There are also course-planning counsellors, and special support services including special education, low incidence, and Learning Assistance teachers. Students download and submit assignments for online courses at *NIDES* using First Class software.

Saanich, School District 63—*South Island Distance Education School*— sides.ca

Saanich's *South Island Distance Education School* has been offering distributed learning opportunities since 1988. They provide courses for Kindergarten–Grade 12, serving districts 61, 62, 63, 64, and 79, as well as adult education. They accept BC and international students. The courses vary from online, print, and blended options.

Students in elementary school register full-time with *SIDES*. This program requires adult instruction, guidance, support, and praise in the form of a home facilitator (parent); it is much like a home-schooling option. There is a *SIDES* teacher available for support and there is a weekly virtual class for students. Students use e-mail to contact their teacher, and specialized classes become available online for the older grades. There are activities and field trips planned regularly to allow students to have social interactions.

Students in Grades 8–12 can use *SIDES* in addition to school, registering on a per-course basis for courses that are otherwise unavailable to them, or as an alternative to school, doing home-schooling full-time instead. Courses may be teacher-led, providing more interactions with peers and the teacher, as well as more variety in resources. Flex-Ed is also available, where students do part of a course through *SIDES* for credit at the school in which they are enrolled.

SIDES offers a special education and low incidence program for students with special needs. There is a renaissance program that is an enrichment philosophy as opposed to a unique curriculum. There are also advance placement courses available to students.

There are a number of resources available to students at *SIDES*. There are paper-based and online courses. The online courses allow more contact with a teacher, and more chance for peer interaction. Students interact with their teacher via phone-calls, face-to-face meetings, virtual class meetings, e-mail, and discussion boards. There is a tutoring centre/study hall that students can utilize, and the *SIDES* school physical space is open Monday to Friday for a variety of times. *SIDES* also provides computer loans to those students who need them. *SIDES* utilizes Elluminate™ software for real-time class discussions, and has course material available on web sites.

Victoria, School District 61—*Home Learners' Link*—sd61.bc.ca/school/hll/

Greater Victoria offers a hybrid approach to distributed learning for students in Kindergarten to Grade 12. Students from Kindergarten to Grade 8 are served by the *Home Learners' Link* and students from Grade 6 to 12 are supported by *The Link @ Burnside*. Information on the latter will be found in the following summary.

Home Learners' Link offers a combination of online and/or paper-based courses, and gives students the chance to participate in a small selection of optional courses available on site. Teachers are in contact with students and their families via e-mail, telephone, and face-to-face meetings. They are responsible for assessment of and reporting on student achievement.

Home Learners' Link provides on-site tutorials, story-times, PE, and other classes. They also have a special education teacher and a teacher-librarian. *HLL* is located at View Royal Elementary School. Students have a separate entrance and their own rooms, as well as access to the school gymnasium and library.

Victoria, School District 61—*The Link @ Burnside*—sd61.bc.ca/school/link/

Courses for students studying at *The Link @ Burnside* are available through a combination of online and/or paper-based course options. Selected courses are also offered through an on-site workshop model. Students are expected to do an average of 4 hours per week of work for each online language program they take, i.e., French, Spanish, or German. Students can choose to stay at a regular school and register on a per-course basis, or register full-time at *The Link @ Burnside*.

Teachers are in contact with students and their families via e-mail, telephone, and face-to-face meetings. They are responsible for assessment of and reporting on student achievement. *The Link @ Burnside* has a special education teacher, a teacher-librarian, and a youth and family counsellor available for its students.

Appendix B: Distributed Learning: School summaries— Other provinces

The following summaries were taken from school and district web pages.

Alberta—*Alberta Distance Learning Centre*—www.adlc.ca

The *Alberta Distance Learning Centre* began as a correspondence education program in 1923. It changed its name to *ADLC* in 1991 and went online in 1996. There are four offices: Barrhead, Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge. Distance education is offered in print, online, and blended formats. This school offers courses at all grade levels for students and schools in Alberta, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut, as well as for international students. The course options at *ADLC* are Elementary, Junior High, Senior High, Vista Virtual, Christian, Francophone, and French Immersion. Students can take all or part of their school programs with *ADLC*, or may take one or more courses through contracted schools. The school is provincially funded; however, courses have fees listed beside them and there is financial aid available for students. Only the *Vista Virtual School* component of *ADLC* has no course fees listed, and has materials listed as “supplied” instead of at a specific cost.

Distributed learning is an option that can be used in combination with traditional classroom-based courses and traditional distance-education courses, or independently to create “entirely virtual classrooms.” The *Vista Virtual School* utilizes print, online, or blended options of course delivery. The online tools used include e-mail, online chat, threaded discussions, audio conferences, and shared whiteboards. Telephone, print, and fax are also used for communicating. Students can access counsellors via e-mail and telephone for academic advising or other needs.

Newfoundland and Labrador—*Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation*—www.cdli.ca

Newfoundland and Labrador’s *Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation* was founded in December 2000 by the Department of Education. Although the website discusses K–12 education, the courses offered seem to be only for Senior High students. Students take courses at *CDLI* that their school cannot offer, as a supplement to their regular school rather than a replacement. The e-courses are taken in a resource room or empty classroom with teachers assigned to monitor work and supervise students.

The primary mode of interaction between students and teachers is asynchronous. The courses utilize WebCT, which has a number of tools, including a course calendar, e-mail, threaded discussion forums, and others. There is also synchronous interaction for classes, allowing real-time instruction. This mode uses Elluminate™ software, which features a class list display, message window, audio window, whiteboard, and graphing calculator. Different courses balance these two modes depending on the specific course requirements. Language classes, for example, require more synchronous instruction and interaction.

There is a Guidance Room available on the website for career planning, teen issues, and so on. The e-counsellor can be contacted via e-mail or telephone.

Ontario—*Avon Maitland Distance Education Centre*—www.amdec.ca

Ontario seems to have two main distributed learning schools. *AMDEC* is an online secondary school administered by the Avon Maitland District School Board. This program is available to Ontario residents under the age of 21 who are not registered on a full-time basis at a school board other than Avon Maitland. Students who are registered full-time at an Ontario public school cannot take courses with *AMDEC* unless their school arranges and pays for them to do so. *AMDEC* accepts non-Ontario students, but they must pay \$900 per course taken.

Courses are online, and so e-mail, live chats, and discussion boards are used as communication devices. Teachers are certified, and are employed by the Avon Maitland District School Board. Teachers are assigned both online and regular day school classes. Students can contact their teacher via e-mail at any time. Twice a week, teachers have structured “chat” time, as well as having office hours in “chat.” There don’t seem to be any face-to-face options for interaction. Guidance chats are also available for counselling services, in both public and private formats.

Ontario—*Virtual Learning Centre*—www.virtuallearning.ca

The *Virtual Learning Centre* has offered a wide range of high school courses for Ontario secondary students since 1997. It is operated by the Trillium Lakelands District School Board. The *Virtual Learning Centre* is part of POOL, Portal Organizations for Online Learning, allowing them to work with other districts and organizations across Canada. Attending the *Virtual Learning Centre* is free if the student is a resident of Ontario and not enrolled at a public school. There is a \$50 access fee that is refundable once the class is finished. If you are not a resident of Ontario, or are enrolled in a publicly-funded school, you may be charged a fee that is assessed once you apply. This school aims to provide flexibility for students by allowing them to take courses not offered at their regular school, or if they cannot take regular classes due to extended absences.

All courses at the *Virtual Learning Centre* are designed using the same template, allowing a uniform look. Students communicate with their instructor and each other using chat lines, whiteboards, threaded discussions, e-mail, and “special teams function.” A certified teacher runs every course and is available online every school day for support and instruction. Online contact is a requirement. While most of the work can be accessed when the student wants, teachers sometimes require synchronous chat sessions.

Appendix C: Distributed Learning schools in BC

as of September, 2006

School Name	SD #
Kootenay Discovery School	05
Rocky Mountain Distributed Learning School	06
Distance Ed School of the Kootenays	08
Homelinks Centre	08
Kootenay-Columbia Virtual School	20
Alternate Programs	22
SD 23 Distributed Learning School	23
Graduation Routes Other Ways	27
Fraser Valley Distance Education School	33
Abbotsford Virtual School	34
Langley Online and Distributed Learning	35
Lochiel U-Connect Centre	35
Surrey Connect	36
Delta Access	37
Home Quest	37
SD 039 Connect Program	39
New Westminster Homelearners' Program	40
Burnaby Online Program	41
SD42 Connected Learning Community	42
Coquitlam Open Learning	43
SPIDER	46
Partners in Education Program (PIE)	47
Howe Sound Outreach School	48
SD 50 Distributed Learning Program	50
Phoenix Program	51
Okanagan Similkameen Outreach School	53
Bulkley Valley Education Connection	54
CIDES - District 57 Connect	57
South Central Interior Distance Ed	58
SD 59 Electronic Education	59
Northern BC Distance Ed School	60
Home Learners' Link	61
Juan de Fuca Distributed Learning	62
South Island Distance Education School	63
District Learners Partnership Program	64
Home Learners' Program	67
Aurora Learning Community	68
Learn @ Home 8-12	68
Learn @ Home K-7	68
Collaborative Education Alternative Program	69
Choices DL	70
North Island Distance Education School	71
eBlend	72
@ KOOL	73
Gold Trail Open Learning Program	74
Mission Home Learners Partnership	75
Fraser Cascade Virtual School	78
Distance Education Program	79
North Coast Distance Education	82
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