BCTF Research Report

Part of the BCTF Information Handbook

Section XII
2003-EI-02

Distributed Learning in B.C., 2002–03

http://www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2003ei02/

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March 2003

This research report consists of the *Report on Distributed Learning to the Representative Assembly, January 31-February 1, 2003*, and two appendices.

RT03-0009
March 2003

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REPORT ON DISTRIBUTED LEARNING TO THE REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY

January 31–February 1, 2003

1. The 2002 AGM called for a report on issues related to distributed learning

This report has been prepared to carry out Recommendation 138 adopted by the 2002 AGM:

> That the BCTF investigate the current state and future expansion of distributed learning and the implications for bargaining, staffing, student learning, curriculum, funding and accountability procedures, and report back with recommendations to the Winter RA 2003.

The report identifies issues related to distributed learning for the consideration of the B.C. Teachers' Federation and its members. However, the many others who have an interest in public education—students, parents, administrators, and those involved in making decisions at the district and provincial levels—should also consider these issues.

2. What is distributed learning?

The definition adopted by the Educators for Distributed Learning (EDL) Provincial Specialist Association says:

> Distributed learning denotes the many avenues of learning via electronic and non-electronic means. Distributed learning includes programs such as distance education, distributed learning, electronic delivery, and hospital/homebound.

The focus of this report is electronic delivery through programs that are aimed at educating students at a distance through computers and the Internet.

Other forms of electronic delivery, such as through integrated learning systems or within a classroom using online learning, should also be examined, but are not covered in this report. It should also be noted that although the EDL PSA incorporates hospital/homebound teachers in its membership, that category of teachers has declined dramatically because the ministry no longer provides separate specified funding for hospital/homebound programs.

3. BCTF policy on distributed learning

The 2001 BCTF Annual General Meeting adopted policy on distributed learning after a great deal of discussion both before and during the AGM.

> **51.11—Distributed Learning**
> That BCTF policy on distributed learning be:
> 1. Distributed learning remains a positive offering within the B.C. public school system when fully supported by adequate staffing, funding and resources within provincial guidelines.
> 2. Distributed learning should not be used in place of sufficient staffing or adequate facilities.

3. a. Distributed learning and electronic delivery of public education programs should be delivered under the provision of the collective agreement.
   b. Distributed learning programs and courses in B.C. public schools should be equivalent to other programs and courses in curriculum, assessment and reporting.
4. Policies on distributed learning should be adopted by any school district that intends to use distributed learning for any of its students, either in its own district, or in conjunction with another district that runs programs:
   a. the teacher local should be involved in the formulation of the policy;
   b. the policy should include criteria and processes for making a decision on whether distributed learning is an appropriate placement;
   c. the policy should consider the social purposes of education, as well as the educational development of individuals.
5. The school district in which any public school student lives should receive funding for that student. Decisions on requests to place the student in a distributed learning program should be made by the school district according to established criteria and processes. If a school district believes that an out-of-district distributed learning placement is most appropriate, then it should make enrolment and financial arrangements with the other district.
6. Development of learning resources for distributed learning should be directed by the Ministry of Education, and BCTF members, identified through the BCTF process, should be involved in the development of the resources and compensated according to their rate of pay under the collective agreement provisions that apply in their local.
7. Distributed learning programs should not include marketing learning materials, courses and programs outside of B.C.
8. There should be no financial or other incentive for parents or school districts to enrol students in one program over another.

(01 AGM, p. 42-43)
Members' Guide to the BCTF 2002-2003 (p. 146)

The BCTF policy identifies two key elements. One is that distributed learning has merit, if it meets appropriate criteria and standards. The other is that creating competition between programs—as created in the new ministry policy—is not an appropriate direction to take.

4. Difficulties of teachers working in distributed learning programs

The current developmental state of online distributed learning raises many questions about policy, decision-making, funding and practice. Raising these issues should not obscure the fact that scores of teachers in many school districts are working to offer programs that are effective in supporting the learning of students.

The difficulties faced by distributed learning teachers are many.

Not enough online learning resources exist that are tied to the B.C. curriculum. The Open School (part of the Open Learning Agency) has had a mandate to provide learning resources, but its future is unclear since it has been put on the market by the B.C. government for privatization. Teachers who have tried to use them have criticized some of the Open School's learning resources. These resources need updating and some are out of print. Teachers are often left with the task of developing their own resources. Issues of copyright and intellectual property arise—from the perspective of both creators and users—when digital resources are used.

Few of the working conditions of teachers in distributed learning are covered by the collective agreement. While all teachers have lost the protection of class size provisions in the collective agreement, electronically delivered distributed learning classes are explicitly excluded from calculating the average class sizes under the regulations that accompany the new legal provisions for class size. Teacher-pupil ratios vary among programs, with some teacher loads of 60 or more elementary students for distributed learning. These students do not count in figuring out the district averages as defined in the legislation and ministry regulations. In addition, the hard class size limits in legislation for primary students do not apply to distributed learning programs.

Some teachers of secondary distributed learning programs in Regional Distance Education Schools have case loads as high as 400-500 students. These numbers are a combination of calculating one student for each course they take and for counselling. This way of describing teacher load is the same as that used in the face-to-face secondary school, where it is likely that the teaching load would be no more than about 200, even under the new imposed teaching conditions.

Some of the students in distributed learning have special needs. Except for one regional school, no resources are provided by the province for the extra work that students with special needs require. Some distributed learning teachers report an increase in the number of students with special needs in their programs because the regular school is no longer able to provide the extra help needed to make the students successful in integrated classrooms.

Teachers have often been left out of the decision-making about distributed learning programs. Decisions related to distributed learning have often been made at both the district and provincial levels without consultation with teacher locals or the BCTF.

Working with parents of children being schooled at home can have its difficulties because of the desire of some of these parents to have full control of the education of their children—a conflict with the newly clarified ministry policy that requires that a member of the College of Teachers be responsible for the education of the children. Many distributed learning teachers have seen one of the very real successes of the program is that it is often a doorway for students being schooled at home to return to the regular programs.

Finally, many feel that colleagues and the BCTF do not have an understanding about the nature and value of their work. In particular, the level of technology and learning resources made available to each individual student as a necessity for these programs looks rich to those struggling in classrooms with not even enough textbooks, let alone computers and software for every student.

The ministry acknowledges that it does not have reliable information about the completion rates of students registered in these programs. Despite these difficulties, many students are successfully completing courses and programs, who otherwise probably would not.

5. Government policy changes

The old funding policy

For several years the ministry provided funding to 18 designated districts for an “electronically delivered pilot program.” The program placed a cap on the number of students eligible for funding at 2,200 students in total, with funding at an amount of $3,500 per student per year. Allocations were provided to 18 school districts to make up this 2,200.

Nine of the 18 districts were those with Regional Distance Education Schools—the program that for some 80 years offered distance education through hard copy and the postal system. Half of the 2,200 positions were designated for the Connect program, a consortium run by these Regional Distance Education Schools. The other nine districts ran new programs created to offer distributed learning. The oldest and largest of these was the E-Bus, run by the Nechako district, with more than 700 funded students.

The new funding policy

Very significant policy changes were adopted by the ministry in the funding for distributed learning for the 2002–2003 school year. In the Operating Grants Manual, the ministry says "The students in Distributed Electronic Learning (DEL) are now funded the same way as regular school-age students." This means that each student is funded at $5,308.

Just as important, the limit was lifted on the number of students funded and the number of districts that could offer these programs. As of 2003–2004, every district is authorized to offer distributed learning and claim $5,308 for each student, with no limit on the number. In addition, the provisions of Bill 34 provide for student choice of school district. This allows any district to offer its program to any student who lives anywhere in the province.

A competitive market for students

This new funding approach is creating a competition for students, with some districts offering incentives for students to sign up. The Gold Trail district, for example, is offering to pay parents $750 per student for learning resources and $250 for Internet connections. The Nechako E-Bus has advertised that it provides a computer and Internet links to families who sign up with the program. Some of the Regional Distance Education Schools have reported that students in their programs have moved to other programs that offer more incentives to sign up.

Funding is determined by the number of students enrolled by September 30, so teachers in some of the programs were told to focus on recruiting students so that there will be enough funding to pay for their positions. Since this is one of the few ways that a district can increase its funding, pressure to find new distributed learning students will increase. Some districts see making a "profit" on those students, even after giving a portion of the public funding to schooling-at-home parents for learning resources, computers, and Internet services.

This kind of competition is exactly opposite to the approach recommended to government in the BCTF policy adopted at the 2001 AGM. It commodifies education and encourages districts competing with incentives to parents to sign up students.

New government requirements for the role of teachers in online distributed learning programs

The ministry announced new requirements for distributed learning at the same time that it lifted the cap on enrolments and opened the field to all school districts. The new policy says:

> ***Distance and Electronic Learning Policy***
> *School Boards are responsible for the education program of students enrolled in their district. The Ministry of Education will no longer make a distinction between the various program delivery models, that the districts may choose, but rather will provide per student funding based on the following four criteria:*
> 1. *The school board is responsible for the education program of students enrolled in the school district.*

2. *The school board is responsible for ensuring that each student's education program is under the supervision of a member of the College of Teachers.*
3. *The school board is required to provide the requirements for an educational program as set out in the following Ministerial Orders:*
   a. *M295/95 (Required Areas of Study) for students in grades K-10, and*
   b. *M205/95 (Graduation Requirements) for students in grades 11-12.*
4. *The school board is responsible for ensuring students are assessed and evaluated by a member of the British Columbia College of Teachers as set out in the following Ministerial Orders:*
   a. *M60/94 (Provincial Learning Assessment),*
   b. *M191/94 (Student Progress Reports),*
   c. *M192/94 (Provincial Letter Grades), and*
   d. *M190/91 (Permanent Student Record).*

[http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/policies/distance_ed.htm]

More teachers required for distributed learning programs

The positive result and significance of these policies is threefold.

First, secondary school courses offered through the Regional Distance Education Schools formerly used "markers" rather than teachers who had certificates as members of the College of Teachers. While some of the markers may have been members of the College, that was not a requirement and many were not. As an example of the impact of moving from markers to teachers, the North Island Distance Education School (NIDES) increased the number of teachers employed from seven to 22.

Secondly, the regulations make it clear that the distributed learning teacher must take responsibility for the provincially required areas of study for the student and for the assessment and reporting on the student's progress. This regulation speaks to the student being schooled at home by the parent and who is registered as a distributed learning student. In some programs in the past, the role of the teacher was essentially that of consultant to the parent. The parent was the teacher and the parent determined what the student was to learn, what learning resources were used, and the evaluation of the student, passing on to the distributed learning teacher the information about the assessment of the student's performance. The regulations now require direct teacher knowledge of the performance of the student and teacher responsibility for making reports on the progress of the student.

Thirdly, the school board is to be held responsible for ensuring that its distributed learning programs are meeting the ministry requirements. The ministry in the 2001–2002 school year clawed back $2.5 million from the Gold Trail School District because it was not meeting these requirements. Gold-Trail had nearly 700 students assigned to one administrator as teacher—and clearly could not have been meeting the requirements for direct teacher responsibility for the students by a member of the College of Teachers that is now explicitly stated in the policy.

Some distributed learning teachers have been told to expect that the ministry will be auditing programs to ensure school board and teacher requirements are being met by districts. These audits could include visiting homes to talk to the students and parents to see if the requirements are being met. If they are not, districts could have funds clawed back by the province.

6. Current state of distributed learning

A. Rapid expansion without adequate planning

In the rush to offer distributed learning programs, some districts have put a priority on getting there first. They have worked on the assumption that those who aren't in on the ground floor will be left out in this new direction for education and will miss an opportunity for supplementary funding for school districts.

Rather than careful planning and taking adequate time to ensure quality programs, some districts have jumped into offering programs. The Connect program of the Regional Distance Education Schools was initially developed in a very short time frame in reaction to a concern that the E-Bus would attract many of the students in the paper-based programs with their offer of computers, software and Internet links and course support online. Similarly, the Vancouver district approved in the late spring of 2002 the development of Grade 12 courses for offering in the fall of 2002, less time than should be provided to develop online versions of complex courses such as English Literature 12 and Physics.

B. "Cash cow" for school districts produces market competition

With the freeze in government funding for public education, districts are understandably looking for any source of additional funding. Distributed learning programs seem to offer this opportunity. Students can be attracted from home schoolers and from students in other districts—either those already in distributed learning programs or from regular, face-to-face programs in the schools.

This becomes a "cash cow" because expenditures in the programs offered for online distributed learning are less than the $5,308 that the province now provides in funding for each student. Most people working in online distributed learning say that this should not be the case. An effective program that is aimed at matching the quality of education in a regular classroom requires expenditures on technology, learning resources, and professional development, as well as on student loads for the teachers that are equivalent or not much different from those for face-to-face teaching.

The clearest case of attempts to use distributed learning as a "cash cow" is that of the Gold Trail School District. The district was audited in 2001–2002 and forced to return to the province $2.5 million. As indicated earlier, it had enrolled more than 600 students and received full funding for them, but provided the support of only one teacher, along with the distribution of funds to the parents to buy materials. The school board was clearly not following a requirement that it ensure "that each student's education program is under the supervision of a member of the College of Teachers." The most experienced teacher working alone 24 hours a day, seven days a week could not possibly supervise the education of more than 600 students.

Even after being caught out once, the district still hoped to use distributed learning to pay off its accumulated deficit. According to the report of a consultant sent in by the Minister of Education to the Gold Trail district, the district planned to pay down its debt through a revised version of its distributed learning program. By having a teacher-student ratio of about 60:1, they hoped to have a surplus of $300,000 a year from 300-plus students, even after giving $1,000 per student to parents for parent-chosen learning resources and for Internet access.

The "cash cow" approach was adopted by the largest urban school district, Vancouver, as well as in the rural Gold Trail. Vancouver plans this year to fund its Connect online distributed learning

program at the same $3,500 per year basis that it formerly received from the ministry. The additional $1,808 the Vancouver district now receives per online student is used to subsidize other programs, although the new school board may review all these distributed learning programs.

The negative impact of competition for students

The combination of an overall education funding freeze, the lifting of the limit on the number of students in distributed learning, and open borders for students to sign up for programs, has produced a climate for competition between districts for students. This may increase funding in some districts. However, it also raises the possibility of more financial problems if a district hires staff based on a set of assumptions of the number of students they will have in their program, but then are unable to recruit that many students.

When distributed learning was placed on the same funding level as other programs, the September 30 date for determination of the number of students funded came with the change. Thus, students signed up after September 30 won't be counted for funding purposes. Yet, if a program has a large number of students claimed on September 30 who drop out of the program, a ministry audit may lead to the ministry clawing back a part of the funding. By their nature, distributed learning programs have a lot of "churn," students coming and going, finishing or dropping out as their circumstances change. The new funding system doesn't really take this into account. No processes are in place to transfer funding from one district to another when a student withdraws or enrols.

The impact of competition is also being felt in the Connect program, the distributed learning program developed through a consortium by the eight Regional Distance Education Schools. The co-operative approach allowed for economies of scale in purchasing and licensing of software and services, saving both money and time for each of the schools. It also allowed for sharing of teacher-developed materials.

This system of sharing worked when the schools were not in competition for students. Each of the schools was designated as the school that worked with students from specific districts on a regional basis. Since they were not in competition, there was a sound basis for co-operation that would produce better programs and save money. Now, by opening up borders and allowing any school to seek students from any district in the province, the basis for co-operation has been undermined and the days of the Connect Consortium could be numbered.

The BCTF policy opposing open borders was aimed at avoiding this situation of competition rather than co-operation.

C. "Home schooled" or "schooled at home"?

Many of the issues in funding for distributed electronic learning fall into a grey area of whether students are home schooled or schooled at home.

There are about 3,700 registered home school students in B.C., about 3,300 with independent schools and 400 with public schools, according to the ministry Standard Report 1555. The first of the distributed electronic delivery programs, the E-Bus, enrolled home-schooled students from around the province. When students signed up with E-Bus, and later with the other "pilot" programs, the students were no longer defined as home schooled. They were now public school students schooled at home. Total numbers of students registered as home schooled peaked in 1996 at 4,917, at the time that the first of the electronic delivery programs was initiated. In each

year after that, registration of students as home schooled fell until 2001, when they totalled 3,651. Registrations as of September 2002 were up only slightly to 3,687.

What is the difference between "home schooled" and "schooled at home"?

The new ministry policy described above now defines this difference. For a program to qualify as a public school distributed electronic learning program (and thus have students qualified for schooled at home), it must meet these criteria:

a. A B.C.-certified member of the College of Teachers must develop, direct and assess the educational program and progress of the student. It is not the parent who does this.

b. The student must follow the prescribed provincially or locally approved curriculum and use ministry- or district-approved learning resources.

c. A B.C.-certified teacher must assess and report on student achievement and the student must take the Foundation Skills Assessment.

If a program does not meet all of these criteria, then the students enrolled in the program are home schooled, not schooled at home in a public school program. If the student is home schooled, the district is eligible to receive only $250, not the $5,308 per public school student.

D. There is more to distributed learning than "at home" or "distance"

The focus of most of this report is on programs and courses delivered through online learning at a distance. However, the integration of online learning into school programs under the direction of a classroom teacher is likely to be the major area of growth of distributed learning.
The proposed secondary graduation requirements will make it more difficult to offer the full range of course choices for students. Schools are to be expected to offer more options at the same time that increased student-teacher ratios produce less flexibility on the part of the school to offer courses that have enough students for only a small class. Schools are likely to turn to online courses to be able to offer a full range of choices for students. This is particularly true of small secondary schools, which already have a limited ability to make the range of courses available to their students.

Online courses may be offered through distance education. On the other hand, they may also operate within a district, enrolling students online from several schools, but within the school setting.

Expanded use of online courses makes it imperative that they be of high quality. Quality online courses require a significant up-front investment in development. Individual school districts each developing versions of the same course are likely to produce courses of lower quality than if these efforts were co-ordinated on a provincial basis. Developers should use models of appropriate pedagogical practice. Much of the literature in online learning promotes constructivist approaches as appropriate. Courses that are really just textbooks online and programs that students just click through are not appropriate.

Many students will not be able to succeed with online learning. This form of learning requires reading skills, motivation and self-discipline. Students should be assessed for having the qualities likely to produce success before being assigned online courses—whether at school or at a distance.

Some school administrators may believe that if a course is online that it does not require a teacher with a background in a particular discipline to teach the course. If they see the teacher as

just a supervisor, students will miss positive support on the content area. Courses offered in this way are not likely to produce as high a quality of learning.

Professional development is required for teachers to be both effective course developers and facilitators of online learning.

Too often infrastructure seems more important than educational content or pedagogical approaches. A focus is put on the computers and networks, rather than first determining educational needs and then designing the infrastructure in the school to support education.

Secondary students who must take courses online to complete their programs should be able to expect pedagogical practices that are appropriate to online learning, access to adequate network access and support from a teacher with a background in the discipline of the course being taken online.

With the pressure to increase online learning, ongoing research should be carried out to evaluate online courses, particularly to understand which pedagogical practices and course structures are more effective. This should include comparison among approaches to online learning as well as to face-to-face classroom learning.

E. Efforts to co-operate and the development of common standards

Given the difficulties of developing a new area such as online distributed learning, a number of significant efforts have been made to carry out co-operative development of programs.

One co-operative effort was with the Connect Consortium of the Regional Distance Education Schools [*http://www.k12connect.ca/*]. District officials had long been working together as a committee to provide some co-ordination among the eight school districts that are home to the Regional Distance Education Schools. They, for example, would meet and negotiate among themselves what they were willing to pay markers, the people who provided student feedback and grades, first on paper, and then more recently electronically. When the opportunity arose to put together programs to stop the E-Bus from grabbing many of the students from the Regional Schools, they created the Connect Consortium to share resources and programs. As noted elsewhere, this group faces new stresses with the development of competition among district programs for students and the funding they bring a district.

Another co-operative effort has been BC4–B.C. Computer Curriculum Consortium [*http://www.bc4.bc.ca/*]. This group grew out of the Pathfinder program. Unlike the Internet-based programs discussed elsewhere in this report, Pathfinder and its new version has been a classroom-based program, often in alternate education centres. The online aspect involves management tools to keep track of student progress, as well as online curriculum material, links to other learning resources, and online tests. This type of technology is often called “Integrated Learning Systems.” BC4 developed out of a need to produce B.C.-related curriculum resources for Pathfinder. After Pathfinder came to the end of its use because of a need to move from text-only to graphic display, the group adopted the name BC4 and continued to work on the development of curriculum for integrated learning systems. Unlike many of the other groups, BC4 has a broad membership made up of teachers, administrators and the private sector company that is marketing the successor to Pathfinder.

The COOL School is another co-operative development. COOL School began in Kelowna with the development of online courses using the WebCT courseware platform. Other districts were invited to join COOL School on the basis that they could use any course already developed and available online and that teachers could modify the courses as they saw fit. In return, districts in

the consortium were to contribute more courses developed by teachers from their district. This initiative started with teachers, but as it began to grow it was taken over by administrators from several school districts. There is now a fee charged to districts to participate in the COOL School.

The fourth group is a consortium that includes the Ministry of Education, the COOL School and representatives of several school districts developing their own initiatives. According to the Ministry of Education web site, it is working "with participating school districts this fall to identify the requirements for one or more content delivery environments appropriate to needs of British Columbia K–12 learners."

F. Social development

One of the important issues about online distributed learning is the impact it has on social development. For example, the British Columbia Secretary-Treasurers' Association in its submission to the ministry's Rural Task Force, raised the concern that electronic learning "does tend to be individual in nature. This removes the 'social' element and student interaction from the education process."

A paper by David Anderson (see Appendix), an online distributed learning teacher, also explores these issues. He raises concerns and questions about the isolation of the teachers working in these programs, as well as students missing the experience of working and learning with other students from a very broad range of backgrounds.

On the other hand, some distributed learning teachers believe that collaborative technological tools and appropriate pedagogical approaches can create opportunities for social development. This is an area of some contention and one that is deserving of research that would help in the design and use of distributed learning.

7. Issues and recommendations

1) Student learning

The purpose of distributed learning—like all education programs—should be to provide rich student learning experiences. With the rapid developments in the technology and the rapid expansion of distributed learning programs, it is often difficult to assess the quality or appropriateness of programs either in general, or for specific students. A number of questions might assist in such assessments.

(a) Is distributed education the only option for a student to take a course or program for reasons such as living in an isolated area, attending a small school without full programs, or being too ill to attend school? Is the program a "last resort" for a student unable to make it in a regular school situation?

(b) What are the pedagogical practices used? Where do they fit on a continuum from an electronic textbook or workbook the individual student works through to rich experiences of co-operative/collaborative learning?

(c) Are the pedagogical approaches matched to the learning style of the student? Does the student require a great deal of direct attention to do the work or is the student self-motivated with little need for outside direction?

(d) Are the students in a distributed learning program doing comparable work in quantity and quality to students in regular face-to-face programs?

(e) Does the student have special needs? If so, can they be met in a distributed learning program?

(f) How are issues of isolation and socialization of students being dealt with?

(g) If the primary contact of the student is with the parent acting as instructor in the home rather than directly with the teacher, what is the ability of the parent to support their children's education at home?

2) Curriculum and learning resources

Students in distributed learning programs are supposed to be using the same curriculum as students in the regular programs. The quality of learning resources for online programs varies widely. Often the learning resources provided for distributed learning have not gone through the same review process as learning resources approved by the ministry.

Some teachers feel pressure to produce online learning resources without adequate consideration of review and revision for quality. Many copyright and intellectual property issues arise over the distribution and use of online materials and web resources.

Corporate sponsorship and resources from U.S. sources like Disney easily become a part of online programs. Companies producing commercial learning resources and computer-based projects often go out of business and leave the technology unsupported. The nature of distributed learning lends itself to commercialization and privatization, as the B.C. government is doing with the Open School.

Some distributed learning programs provide funding for parents to choose their own learning resources. If this is allowed, the teacher should guide choices and ensure that the ministry criteria for learning resources are followed.

Constructivist approaches are generally considered to be good pedagogical practices, particularly in technology-rich programs. Constructivist practices challenge students with knowledge construction activities, such as students working together on solutions to problems, explaining their thinking and designing their own problems to solve. Many of the resources—both commercially developed and teacher developed—do not use constructivist approaches.

A model of course development should include:

(a) A direct link to the provincial curriculum

(b) Constructivist pedagogical approaches

(c) Relating content to pedagogy

(d) Access to existing "learning objects"

(e) Assessment practices

(f) Technology infrastructure required

(g) Technical support for teachers and students

The model should include a framework for evaluating online resources.

["Learning objects" are pieces of software that can be used in a variety of ways. They may be a structure for assessment of work carried out, a piece of multi-media content, and the like. They can be brought into a variety of different courses without having to recreate them for each new course. A collection of these could assist teachers involved in online course development.]

3) Bargaining, the conditions of work and the professional autonomy of teachers

Anecdotal evidence indicates that the following conditions of work apply generally. A BCTF survey through locals with distributed learning programs could prove useful in identifying areas for local policies and pursuit of adequate conditions for teachers in these programs.

- Few school districts have provisions in the collective agreement or in policy that relate to the conditions of work for teachers. The student-teacher ratio varies dramatically from one program to another and from one teacher to another. Class size limits do not exist.
- Teachers are often expected to develop their own learning resources. These are sometimes distributed or sold by school districts or the Open Learning Agency without recognition of the intellectual property of the teacher developing the materials. Teachers have no contractual protection against the practices of taking their materials and using them in this way.
- Decisions about technology platforms (e.g., WebCT or Blackboard) have a significant impact on the way in which programs can be offered and on the cost to the district. However, teachers seldom are included in making these decisions.
- Some districts in advertising their distributed learning programs imply that the teachers can be available for extended hours by e-mail, phone and chat. The contract in some districts does not have limits on the work time of distributed learning teachers.
- Policies on place of work—home or school district facilities—vary substantially from school district to school district.
- Teachers generally have to develop their technology skills themselves without training provisions.
- Levels of support from technicians to keep the computers running and online varies greatly from program to program.
- In programs involving students being schooled at home, an implicit expectation is that the distributed learning teacher will teach the parent working with a child how to teach, and often teach them technical skills as well.
- Distributed learning teachers often work in isolation from colleagues either in their program or the teachers who work in a face-to-face environment.
- Development of online courses requires a great deal of the preparation up front, rather than as an ongoing part of the teaching. Provisions are not in place to recognize this in the way that teachers are paid.
- Proper ergonomic furniture is seldom provided, despite the fact that teachers may spend much of their day in front of a computer and on the phone.

4) Accountability

Accountability for distributed learning should include at least three factors:

1. **Students are offered a quality program that provides an opportunity for them to learn effectively**

This is the most difficult area to assess. A wide range of factors enters into this equation, as indicated in the earlier section of this paper on "student learning."

One indicator of quality might be completion rates. What are they and how do they compare to completion rates in regular school programs? However, even this has to be considered in relationship to the characteristics of the students. For example, if many are students who were socially unable to function in regular classrooms, then it would hardly be valid to compare their completion rates to students who have no such difficulties.

At least one distributed learning teacher says that students in these programs tend to do less work and often of a lower quality than students in regular programs. How might this be assessed on a systematic basis?

A challenge is to find some appropriate way to identify the effectiveness of these programs.

2. The educational program is offered by qualified teaching staff

The new Ministry of Education Distance and Electronic Learning Policy clarifies a key point—it is school boards and members of the College of Teachers who are responsible for the education of students enrolled in distributed learning programs.

This may not seem like it should be new. However, it comes from a context where, in some cases, a parent who chose to school their child at home was considered the person who was directing the child's education and the teacher was a consultant to the parent. Ministry policy now makes it clear "that each student's education program is under the supervision of a member of the College of Teachers." If a parent wishes to supervise the child's education, then they have the option of home schooling—without the technical and professional resources that are provided through public school distributed learning.

The other key change in policy is that students must be "assessed and evaluated by a member of the British Columbia College of Teachers." In the past, the Regional Distance Education Schools hired markers for the assessment and evaluation of courses being taken by secondary level students. These markers did not have to have any particular qualifications. The ministry policy now requires that they be qualified teachers.

3. The funding provided to school districts is expended appropriately

Determining whether funds are being expended appropriately requires open and transparent budget processes. Many of the most important decisions about the development and delivery of a program are budget decisions. In general, decisions about the development of distributed learning have been made by groups of administrators, with very little knowledge or participation of teachers. All budget details should be open for teachers and the public to understand what decisions are being made about online distributed learning.

Major questions still remain about what are appropriate expenditures. Should funds be given to parents to purchase learning resources? Should computers and Internet connections be provided? On what basis? What amount of the resources for these programs should go to providing the support of a teacher at the other end of a phone and computer link?

Funding for school districts is based on enrolments at September 30. What if a district makes a big push to sign up students by September 30, but then many of them simply do not follow through in finishing the program? What level of fall-off of students is acceptable? If students leave the distributed learning program and return to a regular school, should the funding follow them to that school? Are students excluded from signing up for programs if they have not registered by September 30, since they bring no funding resources for the program?

Possible strategies for BCTF action on distributed learning issues:

1. Find out what is happening in the various programs being developed by districts.

   Survey locals to develop a detailed picture of current programs and, in particular, anticipated future directions. Distinguish between distance learning and online learning within the school in describing these future directions.

2. Develop descriptions of teaching practice and teaching conditions in distributed learning.

   Develop descriptions of the work of teachers in distributed learning programs through a teacher research project. Examine the pedagogical theories related to distributed learning. Include regular classroom teachers in the research to build links and understanding between teachers in the different programs.

3. Define standards for conditions of work of teachers working in distributed learning programs.

   Standards for conditions of work should include number of students a teacher should work with, preparation time, access to professional development, physical conditions appropriate for health and safety of the teacher, hours of work that have a limit on both a daily basis and over the year.

4. Increase teacher influence in the direction of distributed learning.

   Bring together the various groups working on distributed learning to address the issues together and make recommendations. This would include the Educators for Distributed Learning PSA, CUEBC, and teacher members of BC4, COOL School and other programs. Engage BCTF locals in the process as well.

   Areas where teachers should have influence include choices of technology, learning resources, pedagogical practices and assessment and evaluation.

5. Encourage locals to monitor school district practices and to engage distributed learning teachers in the local.

   Locals need to be aware of the policies and practices of their school district. When districts do not comply with the ministry requirements that are the basis of funding, the impact of the province taking back funding can have a negative effect on other programs in the district. The local should also ensure that the conditions of work of teachers in these programs meet both the terms of the collective agreement and sound practice in areas not covered by the collective agreement.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author of this report, Larry Kuehn, Director, Research & Technology Division at the B.C. Teachers' Federation, acknowledges the information and ideas from a number of BCTF members in preparation of this report.

The report was developed out of a seminar on distributed learning held in October 2002, along with other research on the issues. Participants in the seminar included teachers chosen by the Educators for Distributed Learning (EDL) [Janet Deslisle, Ray Furlotte, Julia Hengstler, Suzie Mah] and the Computer Using Educators of B.C. (CUEBC) [Ben Vriend] Provincial Specialist Associations, David Anderson, a distributed learning teacher and the originator of the AGM motion calling for the report, and Richard Smith, president of the Gold Trail Teachers' Association.

Additional input was received from Kevin Amboe and Shelley Wilcox, organizers of a CUEBC conference on online learning to be held in May 2003. Section 6.D, in particular, reflects issues that they have raised.

Appendix 1, *Challenges for Distance Education,* was written by one of the seminar participants, David Anderson. The paper was not discussed as part of the seminar and other participants have not expressed their views on it—pro or con.

Appendix 2, *Distance Education: A view from the inside,* was written by three teacher/ counsellors on staff at the Greater Vancouver Distance Education School, in response to this report and Appendix 1.

APPENDIX 1

Challenges for Distance Education

by David Anderson

There are a number of significant issues facing distance education at this time. The importance of a wider discussion among parents and educators about learning at home is being driven by our provincial government's interest in online learning. The following comments reflect questions that are beginning to arise regarding learning at home and correspondence programs in general.

The collective learning experience

What is the nature of the home learning environment, and how does it compare with the learning environment in a regular classroom? Do distance education schools consider the differences and augment the home learning environment with collective and collaborative learning experiences? Does the planning of distance education delivery take into account the variety of learning experiences available in classrooms? Distance education will meet this challenge as it begins to consider the importance of collective and collaborative education, and finds ways to build these experiences into the home learning environment.

Consider for a moment the circumstances of a student sitting in her desk in her Grade 4 classroom at the local elementary school. The teacher hands out the assignment for the day, involving Science, Math, History, current events, and collaborative problem solving. The student learning at home might well receive the same assignment from her home instructor. The student in the classroom hears the voices of the children around her, and listens to the language of inquiry, of hypothesizing, of estimating, of applying previously learned information. She hears children her own age puzzle over issues, and sees herself in relation to other learners, and thereby discovers valuable information about knowledge and learning, and her own intellectual progress in relation to children her age. The student learning at home hears none of this, unless the home instructor is able to bring children together, and organizes curricular topics through collaborative activities.

How can distance education schools and teachers bring their students together? What kinds of learning activities can be designed for students learning at home that will provide the opportunities for self-awareness that are available to students in regular classrooms? How can distance education programs inspire social responsibility and demonstrate the value of collective human activity?

The promise of technology

Distance education is vulnerable to the technology consultants who hover around the home learning community, promising to provide all the interaction and connectedness of a regular school through the use of electronic, Internet based communications. Corporations, large and small, promise to connect students with other students and their teachers, with enormously expensive and technically complex “integrated learning environments,” including curriculum content, two-way voice and video conferencing, and access to all the knowledge and wisdom the Internet is rumored to contain. These electronic solutions are sold to distance education schools as panaceas to the isolation experienced by many students learning at home. Some within

distance education are clutching at these electronic solutions without sufficient technical understanding of how precarious computer based processes can be.

For example, distance education schools are purchasing licenses to operate Internet learning environments that include voice and real-time white board displays, so that the teacher can convene a group of students and draw pictures on their computer screens at home. In this virtual classroom, students can speak to each other and to the teacher using the sound systems in their computers. However, during training sessions for teachers, it is discovered that the virtual learning environment requires extensive technical support, and even then, some computers simply refuse to cooperate. The designers and promoters of this electronic classroom receive payment for their products even though the promise of a virtual community is rarely realized.

When electronic learning companies say their products will do everything the purchaser requires, distance education schools tend to believe them. Electronic education cheerleaders fill the air with superlatives, but when people down in the trenches experience the shortcomings of the electronic promises, the promoters dismiss the "Luddites" and heretics with one hand, and pick up the phone and order more technicians, computers, and online courses with the other. Money tends to be available for distance education projects with startling ease, particularly when technology is involved. Can distance education learn to be frugal with public money in the face of such deep pockets?

> A distance education school recently upgraded all of the computers loaned to students for use at home. In one year, it purchased sixty new Pentium towers, 25 digital cameras for student projects, and a $3,000 networked colour ink jet printer for the office. Down the street, the local elementary school of 450 students had a budget of $3,000 for all of its technology needs for that entire year.

When devising electronically delivered home learning programs, educators as well as parents must consider the amount of time a student should be sitting in front of a computer screen in any given 24 hour period. At what point does the elapsed time begin to affect posture, eye health, and tolerance for repetitive wrist motion? What particular concerns relate to the fact that computer use is being suggested for children as young as four and five?

How much time should be spent holding a book, or looking at a mountain, or listening to a saxophone up close? Distance education, if it is to survive, must learn to use the computer judiciously, when it is the very best way to accomplish a specific task. A computer can do many things, but not all of them are useful, desirable, or reliable across a wide spectrum of real world situations. Unfortunately, by the time people realize this, the promoters and cheerleaders are off onto some new adventure, and parents, schools, teachers, and students are left holding the half-full bag.

Distance education teachers and the wider community of educators

There are those within the distance education community who devalue the importance of collective learning activities for students. It is important for teachers to understand the implications of the prevailing climate of alienation and individualism in our society. Federal and provincial governments are withdrawing from the social contract and the philosophy of supporting less privileged citizens. All schools have a critical role to play in opposing this trend.

Part of this discussion touches on the relationship of the distance education community to the general body of educators working in face-to-face settings. A significant challenge for distance

education is the relative isolation of the distance education teacher from teachers in the regular system. The separation of distance education teachers from classroom teachers comes with its own attendant costs.

There is a concern among distance education teachers that they are under attack for no reason other than they threaten the regular school by offering a superior product. Some distance education teachers feel that they are the ones who truly are looking after the best interests of students, rather than the regular school system. Distance education teachers have spoken defiantly about the need for students to get away from the classroom, to be instead instructed at home by a loving and attentive parent or family member. And there is resentment for having to defend their practice as educators from the criticisms and concerns raised by teachers both within and outside the distance education system.

Part of this fracturing of the teaching community stems from the lack of consensus as to the role to be played by distance education in our society. Is it to be a stopgap measure, a temporary situation for reasons of health or travel? Do some students simply need a break from the classroom for a year? Or is it to be considered a full replacement for regular school, to be implemented from Kindergarten to Grade 12? Does the wider community of teachers need to be concerned that while conventional classrooms are under attack due to education budget cuts, distance education schools are actively recruiting students?

In the past year, distance education schools have been told by this provincial government that they better start recruiting full-time students if they want to continue to be funded as part of the public education system. As a result, distance education teachers now talk openly of recruiting students as the main priority for the years ahead. The government, for its part, does not seem to be concerned about the isolation of the distance education student as much as it is interested in dispersing students to their homes to save on school construction costs, to economize on the hiring of trained teachers, and to dismantle the network of special education support currently fighting for survival in the regular school system.

The feeling of defensiveness among distance education teachers is a barrier to the vitality of distance education. The quality of the home learning experience benefits from a free flow of ideas and information between all teachers in the school system. Within the wider teaching community, there is a constantly growing wealth of ideas and information about education theory and child development. Direct participation of distance education teachers in collective processes of inquiry and reflection is in everyone's interest.

Creating distance education curriculum materials and resources

Distance education schools have relied on a number of sources for the programs being sent home to distance education students. The main provider of elementary programs has been the Open Learning Agency, and its subdivision, Open School. The current provincial government has taken over the operation of the Open Learning Agency, and is concentrating on post secondary programs, as well as the marketing of B.C. curriculum resources and materials to other countries. The reliance on the Open Learning Agency for materials takes on new significance now that the provincial government is no longer supporting the production of correspondence materials. Distance education schools have a few years of grace while they convert lessons to the Internet, and whittle away at the stores in the warehouse. Soon they must take up the design and production of home learning materials on their own.

Owing to the rather peculiar nature of home learning material design, and its gold rush history of rapid expansion, unlimited government spending, and high demand from distance education

schools throughout B.C. and Alberta, some rather odd things have happened. Not unexpectedly, teachers recognized the sorry state of early correspondence materials, based on old textbooks and endless pages of math drills. Teachers created their own materials and courses, including print as well as Internet based online units. Issues have arisen, however, with regard to the wide-open frontier mentality of the curriculum explosion of the last five to ten years.

The provincial government has made a practice of recruiting distance education teachers to produce courses and materials, purchasing the work with cash payments, and then using its printing facilities and Ministry of Education web servers to duplicate and distribute the teacher made courses throughout the province. The missing piece is the screening of the material prior to release. Whereas the Ministry has a comprehensive process for the acceptance of learning materials, known as *Evaluating, Selecting and Managing Learning Resources*, published by the Ministry of Education, the "home cooked" distance education materials acquired by the government appear to have sidestepped this screening process in the rush to equip distance education schools with the latest online materials. As a result, unproofread and hastily prepared material has found its way into the hands of distance education students, paid for with government funds.

A closer relationship between the distance education teaching community and teachers in the school system would bring with it a chance for teachers and course designers to participate in the larger curricular questions of the day. Distance education materials would begin to reflect the debates and discussions taking place among all teachers. The importance of global education, understanding the educator's role in sustaining a just and caring society, and the most current practices in developing social responsibility would improve distance education materials and bring learning at home up to speed with the current innovations found in an increasing number of classrooms. An active connection between distance education teachers and all other teachers is the right direction. It is one of the most important challenges.

Supporting the home instructor

The distance education school system relies on individuals other than trained teachers to implement the educational processes in the home. Distance education must, at some point, analyze the situation for home instructors, and consider how best to support them. In some cases, home instructors are eager and enthusiastic, and support the learning of their own children using print and electronic materials from the distance education school, supplementing this with social experiences with groups of children, field trips, outings, sports camps, choirs, community center programs, and drama clubs. However, this is not always the case. Distance education schools must come to grips with the reluctant or overwhelmed home instructor. Running a home and a school at the same time is not an easy thing to do, particularly when difficulties with learning or motivation appear. A number of home instructors are supervising more than one student, and this requires the management of multiple grade levels of schooling, along with differences in learning styles and abilities.

> A home instructor has created elaborate weekly schedules for his Grade 2 daughter and Grade 6 son. Each day is carefully mapped out for each child, in various colours, indicating periods for language arts, math, spelling, physical education, reading, art, and visits to the library. The schedules are mounted on the wall of the children's study area, and shown to the distance education teacher during a home visit to indicate the effort to organize schoolwork and ensure that it is completed regularly. The schedules do not alter the fact that the children submit virtually no work for months at a time.

One crucial aspect of supporting the home instructor relates to the amount of schoolwork completed by the student in a distance education program. Practicing professional teachers learn about student output through university training, and more importantly, through direct experience working in schools, alongside other teachers, and through continuous in-service and professional development. Home instructors can be encouraged by distance education teachers to expect a certain level of student output, but it is typically very difficult for parents to have a concrete sense of how much work to anticipate each day, each week, and throughout the year.

> The home instructor of a Grade 5 boy is surprised to be told that for the first three months of the school year, no work has been submitted for marking and evaluation, even though frequent reminders have been sent to the student during this time. The home instructor tells the teacher, "Every time I look over at him, his books are open and he is typing away at the computer. I find it hard to believe that he is behind in his assignments."

The difficulty parents have in estimating how much work to expect translates into fairly low output overall among students learning at home. In some cases, distance education schools see virtually nothing in the way of schoolwork for months on end, and then a flurry of work at report card time, the total amounting to only a fraction of the output of students in regular classrooms. This is not to equate quantity and quality, but the amount of corrected practice available to students in classrooms offers the possibility of improved skill mastery, and improved use of skills applied to creative projects. Even though students learning at home are every bit as capable as students learning in schools, they tend to produce less, and as a result, receive less feedback.

> The home instructor of a Grade 6 girl calls the distance education teacher to complain about the grades on the February report card. The girl is a rising tennis star, and has a very heavy practice schedule. Some assignments have been completed but were not submitted because the girl is a perfectionist, according to the parent. The grades on the report card do not reflect the girl's ability, and the distance education school should take into account the fact that a tennis career is very time consuming, and the school should not expect all work to be submitted all the time.

> A home instructor insists that all the work submitted was actually done by his daughter, even though the answers to the math questions are obviously written by an adult. Upon further discussion, it is mentioned that the daughter tires easily, and in order to complete the assignments on time, the daughter dictates the answers to the father who then writes them down. When the distance education teacher visits the girl in her home, he gives her some of the problems to do from the math assignments recently submitted. The girl cannot do any of the problems posed by the visiting teacher.

The support and guidance of home instructors is another challenge for distance education. The government has indicated to all nine regional distance education schools that if learning is not verifiable to outside auditors, funding will be shut down. Most distance education schools have puzzled over the situation they face with increasing accountability and parents trying to figure out the instructions for the home study packages. Parents have asked distance education schools for help in contacting other parents, in order to form support groups. Such groups do exist, and distance education schools do what they can to provide the connections needed by home instructors to support their efforts to manage successful learning.

Special needs support

How are learning difficulties to be addressed in the distance education environment? One option is to accept the provincial government's sweeping dismissal of the need for special needs support. The Ministry of Education has approached the support of children with learning difficulties by simply declaring the problem to be a creation of the teacher unions. Current government estimates of the distribution of children with special needs are creeping down from the heretofore-acknowledged level of twelve percent. Ministry of Education officials responsible for special education programs are buying into the theory that the need for support is fictitious, and that simply declaring this to be the case is enough to justify massive cutbacks to special programs in regular schools.

> A distance education teacher attempts to acquire diagnostic services for a student whose learning and behavioral differences prevent attendance at the local elementary school. Special education attendants have been reduced by the school district, and this student requires full-time assistance. The distance education school enrolling this student has no access to district services needed to re-integrate the student into the school of her choice. The wait for psychological assessment is running at three years, and this student is disqualified from being placed on this list due to the fact that she is not enrolled in a regular school, due to her learning difficulties.

One of the regional distance education schools, South Island Distance Education School, has established an arrangement with local school authorities to provide special needs evaluation and support services for their distance education students. But this is the exception. Other distance education schools in the province are without diagnostic services, counseling, speech and language evaluation, speech correction, or learning disability remediation facilities. The unfortunate tendency of school boards struggling to live with diminished provincial education funding has been to reduce these services for the regular school populations, so the future does not look bright in this regard. For distance education schools, this issue cannot be swept aside much longer, as enrollments of children with special needs are increasing, according to teachers in those schools. Distance education schools are going to have to become much more vocal in support of the learning needs of their students. The tide is moving in the wrong direction at present.

> A family from Eastern Europe has two young children learning to speak English in their local elementary school. Recent cuts to ESL services result in the children receiving only two periods of language instruction per week. Progress is very slow, and the parents are concerned that other students are making fun of the children's heavy accents. The parents decide to withdraw their children from regular school in order to protect them from embarrassment. The distance education school in which the students are enrolled has no ESL services available whatsoever, and the children must learn English on their own at home.

Where to from here?

The future for distance education appears to hinge on its ability and desire to analyze the nature of learning in a regular classroom, and to bring social aspects of child growth and development to the home learning environment. At the same time, distance education teachers need to be more actively involved with larger organizations of teachers such as the BCTF. Teachers and teacher organizations must play a leading role in the implementation of the distance education model, or else the government will impose its view of distance education, meaning greater corporate involvement, more commercialization of programs and services, greater entrepreneurial activity in the creation and marketing of distance education curriculum materials, and slim chance of special needs support.

A positive sign for distance education is the growth and proliferation of blended (online and face-to-face combined) programs. Creative secondary school teachers are currently combining aspects of distance education and regular class attendance to maximize the potential of the online learning environment.

In order to stand up to the government, distance education teachers will need the support of all teachers in the school system, and sooner rather than later. The best way to generate this support and understanding is for distance educators to participate in the ongoing discussions of the role and purpose of schooling, whether in classrooms, on the Internet, or in the home.

Teachers need teachers. Parents need parents. And students need other students. Can the distance education community find a way to bring the richness of social and collective education into the home learning environment? That is the challenge for distance education today.

Appendix 2

DISTANCE EDUCATION: A VIEW FROM THE INSIDE

The aim of this paper is to share our observations based on a combined twenty-two years of Distance Education secondary counselling experience among the three undersigned counsellors. At present, our focus of responsibility is to assist online students to succeed in their educational goals.

History:

The evolution of Distance Education began in about 1919 in Victoria, with the Ministry of Education Correspondence Branch. The purpose of correspondence then was to educate students in rural B.C., such as students on trap lines, in lighthouses, on remote farms, etc. In the mid-1980s, the Ministry of Education began to decentralize its Correspondence Branch into nine regional correspondence schools. Print-based course materials, once produced by Queen's Printer, were eventually created for Distance Education Schools by the Open School, a division of the Open Learning Agency. In the mid-1990s, online education (CoNNect) became an enhancement to the paper-based correspondence program.

Why students and parents choose Distance Education:

The choice of Distance Education continues to be a viable alternative for a small percentage of students unable to succeed in a school classroom environment. Our students and their parents choose to leave the traditional classroom for many reasons, while continuing to earn course credits in the B.C. curriculum. They choose to enroll in Distance Education because of health or emotional problems; having been social ostracized or bullied; experiencing attendance difficulties in the regular school classroom; being incarcerated or on probation; working full-time to support families; operating their own businesses; traveling out of the country; involved in activities such as high-level athletics, musicianship, and acting/modeling. In addition, some students choose to remain in school, while taking one or more courses with Distance Education that may be unavailable at their home school. Distance Education is often a viable alternative for those who are suspended from a course or suspended from their home school. Further, the DE computer-enhanced course delivery system allows a flexibility that some parents and students find attractive.

Opportunities:

There are many opportunities for Distance Education students enrolled in computer-enhanced courses. This curriculum delivery system:

- promotes a high level of creativity and flexibility for both student and educator.
- offers the opportunity to study at a self-determined pace and time.
- brings educational delivery in line with the current technology that many students use in their leisure hours.
- appeals to visual learners.
- is very portable.
- can be designed to be interactive, web-based, and teacher-monitored.
- promotes life-long learning by teaching the basic use of the computer, plus challenging students to stretch their technological capabilities for future educational opportunities.

At its best, computer-enhanced distance education can promote a high level of creativity and flexibility for both student and educator.

Challenges:

Students enrolled in Distance Education also face challenges.

- Social development of the student is currently being addressed by offering a robust program of field trips, cultural events, "school-in-a-day" programs, online discussions, participation in group physical activities, plus social events for students and their families.
- Working in a self-paced environment must be built on a firm foundation of self-discipline and well-developed organizational skills.
- The collaborative learning experience can be more difficult in an online environment but this is being addressed by teacher direction in our robust program.

Perception vs. Reality:

Perception: Some educators assume that students involved in Distance Education are studying alone sitting placidly in front of a computer, socially isolated, and using outdated course materials.
Reality: The combination of online and paper-based curriculum, and their own choice of flexible time frame allows students to engage in their own interactive community activities. As well, students are often involved in online discussions with their teachers and other students.

Perception: Online courses are designed by non-educators working for profit-driven, private corporations.
Reality: Online content is being created in Distance Education by experienced educators supported by a strong technical team. This is similar to classroom educators creating and producing new courses for their students.

Perception: There is a perception that Distance Education, in general, and computer-enhanced education, in particular, will or should replace the classroom teacher.
Reality: This delivery model is the appropriate choice for a small percentage of learners. In our experience, it should not replace the classroom environment for the majority of students.

Perception: Students do not complete Distance Education courses.
Reality: Students graduate and proceed to post-secondary education, just as they do from other secondary schools.

In conclusion, we observe that technology is a marvelous learning tool for both students and educators and it is here to stay. Our hope is to integrate all available learning environments, to offer greater educational choices, and not to replace the classroom experience for students.

We sincerely hope that our expressed views will provoke discussion at the BCTF AGM and promote dialogue between the Distance Education community of teachers and teachers in the classroom.

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